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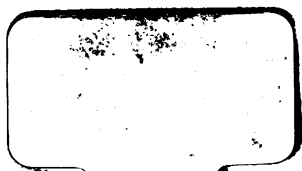
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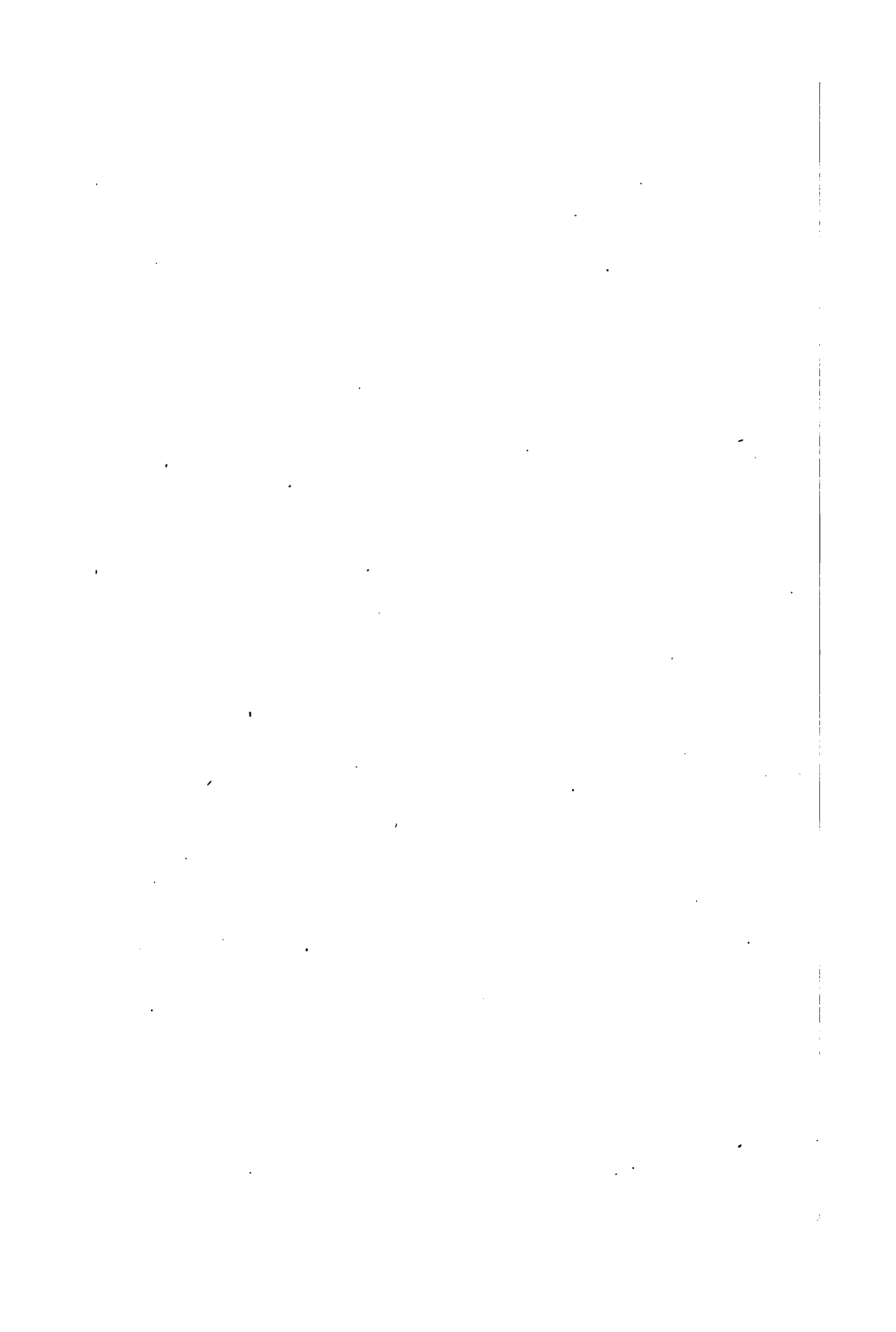
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PAUL FOSTER'S DAUGHTER.

BY

DUTTON COOK.

Hamlet. O Jephthah, judge of Israel—what a treasure had'st thou!

Polonius. What treasure had he, my lord?

Hamlet. Why—

One fair daughter and no more,

The which he loved passing well.

Polonius. Still on my daughter. (*Aside*).

Hamlet. Am I not i' the right, old Jephthah?

Polonius. If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter,
that I love passing well.

SHAKESPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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PAUL FOSTER'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

JEFFREY and Edwin had dined together in Gloucester Terrace as usual. The meal had been unentertaining, dull even—a business, not a pleasure. Jeffrey was taciturn and gloomy. He had no stories to tell; no gossip to relate; he was not in any way conversational. When he did talk to Edwin it had always been in a measure patronisingly, and with some little air of effort and condescension; but this had not been unpleasantly manifest. He liked to please,

even his brother; for Jeffrey, in his cold, grand way, courted approbation, and warmed under the applause of men. But to-day he was moved by no such cares; he ate in silence, with sombre earnestness. Ned made few endeavours to draw him from his gloom. He was accustomed to silence and abstraction, and to be little cared for, and little attended to in that house, and amused himself, as he best could, with his own thoughts, with memories of Miss Aurelia Vane's idiot boy, or the last *jeu-d'esprit* of Septimus, or with art-fancies in connection with uncle Poll and cousin Sylvia. The dinner concluded, Jeffrey left the room and mounted the stairs to see his father. Ned made for the window. It was raining,—a dense, low-hanging, moist, gray sky—a dismal, depressing evening, chilly, as wet weather will be even in summer months. He drummed moodily on the window panes, breathed on them and drew faces with his finger-nail, watched the rain collect on the area-

railings, and then fall at intervals with amassed strength in dirty big drops.

"A wet night," said Jeffrey to his father.

"Cruel weather, Jeffrey; it tries me dreadfully; it keeps me back, too. Ah! we don't have the bright, genial, sunshiny summers we used to have, years ago. Things are quite altered now." And the poor old invalid rubbed his shaking, shrivelled hands together, and crouched close to his fire, his chin very near to his knees. He looked very little, and miserable, and broken up, did John Whincop Erle just then. Jeffrey surveyed him—perhaps with more curiosity than pity. Those in immediate and constant attendance on the sick fail to see much change in them for better or for worse, till stopping some day to "take stock" of their patients, as it were, they are struck with the notion that they are recovering or dying fast, as the case may be.

"I think a few nice, warm, sunny days would almost bring me round." But his

voice was very weak and treble. He had always been looking to benefit from change in the weather ; but the change came without the benefit. Now he wanted fine bracing weather—now good, summer suns ; now it was too wet, too sultry, too dry, too moist. He was hard to please ; and, in truth, the old man was not recovering, and was more failing, and fractious, and fatigued, and peevish, every day.

“What says Dr. Turner?” asks Jeffrey, with interest, and with sympathy in his tones, for he perceived that an alteration had come over the old man during the last few weeks.

“He’s giving me some new medicine. I don’t quite know what it is, but it’s not unpleasant. You can taste it if you like. It’s that in the bottle there—dark red.”

Invalids are rather partial to your tasting their physic. Jeffrey did not avail himself of the permission, though he took up the bottle.

"Does it give you relief?"

"I think it eases my chest a little, but it touches my head I am afraid. It makes me feel very queer at night—I fancy all sorts of things, and I can't get to sleep. Oh, dear me! Babette, you take up all the room, and want the best part of the fire. Move, you beast. Jeffrey, my dear, will you draw that curtain, or, better still, close the shutter. I can't help thinking there's a draught comes from that window and catches my right shoulder. And will you put this cushion straight, it has slipped down and annoys me. Thank you, Jeffrey."

Complying with these requests he, too, sat down by the fire.

"Where's Ned?" asked the old man.

"I left him downstairs."

"Why doesn't he come up to see me—to ask how I am?"

"I daresay he will come up soon. Perhaps he thought we had some business to discuss."

"More likely that he thought nothing of the sort."

There was a pause. The old man was decidedly petulant, and Jeffrey was relapsing into gloom.

"How does he get on in Lincoln's Inn?"

"Tolerably."

"Does he work well? Do you keep him well to it? Is he worth his salt yet?"

"He is tolerably industrious, but without interest in his work. He likes to make it evident that his heart is not with his profession—that his tastes are opposed to it."

"He is idle, sir—that's what it is—or he is insubordinate. Takes no interest, eh? Perhaps he is counting upon my death, Jeffrey, and hopes to undo my plans—looks to taking his head out of the yoke when that occurs." Mr. Erle spoke with great anger. "Is that so, do you think?"

"Honestly, I do not."

"Then the idle, artist, vagabond blood of the Barielles is shewing itself in him. Taste, and talent, and fancy—stuff! By heaven, I'll knock this out of him before he's many months older."

"A good thing, if possible—certainly not easy."

"I'll do it, though."

"You thought you had done so before, when you made him renounce the profession of the Fine Arts, for which he fancied himself adapted, and bound him as your apprentice."

"Hum!—It was only a partial success, it seems. Perhaps he thought to slip through my fingers the better by yielding to my will."

"No, he gave in with great reluctance, after a hard fight, without *arriere pensée*, I believe."

"What would you advise, Jeffrey?"

"I hardly know." And the son looked

keenly at his father by the fire-light, for the night was closing in, and watched the effect upon him, as he said carelessly:—

“It is a pity that he is so constantly amongst people who foster his silly ambitions, and give him extravagant notions of his talents, and pamper his vanity in every way. No wonder the boy turns from a study that requires steady, hard, unswerving work—unremunerative and unthankful enough for a long while, it must be owned—to gather laurels from facile exploits in the studio. Of course he likes praise, and does not perceive that he is earning it in a most trumpery way, and from interested admirers.”

“Whom do you mean?”

“Oh!—well—his artist friends.”

“Hum! Old Paul Foster amongst them, I suppose.”

Jeffrey's eyes brightened. He was pleased that the suggestion came from his father, as he had proposed to himself it should. ‘It

is not I that am damaging Ned or the Fosters, it is my father's own doing.' So he congratulated himself, not heeding that he had led the old gentleman the whole distance, although he had taken the final step unassisted.

"You think Paul Foster has an influence over him?"

"I think it probable."

"And does him harm."

"You can judge yourself if he is likely to do him any good. You know Mr. Foster?"

"I know the old thief. By heaven! if I thought—and the daughter too. Why, Jeffrey, man, where are your wits—don't you see?—the thing's a trap, a plant—they fancy, the fools, that the boy will have money—they want to trick him into—"

"Hush!—hush!—Ned's on the stairs."

Jeffrey stopped him just in time. Edwin entered the drawing-room very quietly.

"How are you, father, to-night?"

"I'm better, thank you, much better."

The old man was trembling with passion, and could hardly speak. Jeffrey looked from his father to Ned with some anxiety, as a man who has fired a train and doubts whether he may not himself be demolished by the explosion.

"It's a most dismal evening," remarks Ned, by way of saying something, after a slight pause and silence, broken only by the noisy breathing of the old man.

"Dont talk to me of the weather, sir! D—n your dismal evening!"

Ned glanced amazed at his father—then at Jeffrey for explanation; but the elder brother did not meet his eyes. He was studying, with an absorbed curiosity, the fire in the grate.

"Look here! I'll have no nonsense. I'll not be humbugged. You're mistaken in your man."

"What do you mean, father?"

"Don't stand there, sir, questioning me."

Don't think to take me in, you poor pitiful fool, you! I'm not a dupe, if you are. Look here!—one word for all. You shall never go to Paul Foster's again! Never enter his door again! You shall give him up—cut him—dead, altogether! There! Do you hear?”

“Never see him more?”

“Never! Don't you hear? Don't you understand? Don't you know what that means? Never!”

“Why not?”

Ned stood up erect, pale, trembling, but nervously, not from fear, with a very wild bright light in his eyes. Jeffrey still gazed into the grate; but he was twisting his fingers about, and ill at ease—evidently alarmed at the whirlwind he had raised. Mr. Erle tottered up from his chair and leant against the mantelpiece, holding out a menacing thin weak hand at his younger son.

“Why not? Because I forbid it—isn't

that enough? Because he's a scoundrel, and a rogue, and a cheat."

"He's Sylvia's father," said Ned, stoutly.

"What of that?—what of Sylvia?—what of her? Who is she?"

"The child of your own wife's sister."

"And like her mother, perhaps. What was she?—a worthless, shameless creature, tricking her poor idiot of a husband."

"It's not true!"

Ned screamed rather than spoke the words, and brought his hand down heavily on the table. One violence seemed to kill the other. There was silence for some minutes after. His father glared at him with speechless rage and amazement, shaking a withered clenched fist at him. Jeffrey stood up between them.

"How can you address your father like that, Edwin?"

He tried to speak with calm dignity, but in good sooth his voice trembled very much.

"Knock him down, Jeffrey! Knock him down! He insults me! He tells me I lie! Hit him, sir!—will you let him talk to me like that? Hit him!—kill him! Oh! that I had strength! Oh, that I could get at him!"

And the old man fell back into his chair.

"Be calm, father; how dare you, Edwin, speak like that?"

"How dare you, Jeffrey, sit still there and hear such things spoken of Paul and Sylvia? Don't frown at me, Jeffrey—I'm not afraid!"

"If you have no respect for your father, I cannot wonder that you have none for me. My father would only speak what is true."

"True every word of it," feebly croaked the old man, exhausted by his own violence.

"I don't believe it," said Ned, simply. "I know nothing of these stories. But I know Paul—I know Sylvia. I know that her

mother was twin-sister to mine. I will not believe anything to her prejudice. I say I will not!"

"Romance and school-boy folly!" sneered Jeffrey.

Mr. Erle roused himself.

"You will go to Foster's again at your peril! Choose between him and me. Go there once again, and this door is shut for ever against you afterwards. You know what that means, sir? Make up your mind."

"I *do* know what that means — I *have* made up my mind."

"Well?"

"I will not give up Paul Foster, nor my cousin Sylvia. I will not throw away in a second those who have been kind to me throughout my whole life. I love them, they love me; I will trample under foot that love at the bidding of no one. It is not for myself only that I speak—I feel that they are with me in this matter. I know what is

duty—what is the meaning of a child's obedience—but there is a limit even to that. I will not do this great wrong. *You* have disposed of me—sacrificed my inclinations, and my wishes, and my hopes, in one matter ; that is enough ! I yielded then, I will not yield now. Turn me away—close the door against me, if you will—I cannot help it. I am not naturally cold, or ungrateful, or unfilial. I would love you if you would let me ; and I *have* opened my heart to you, father, and to you, Jeffrey, only to have it closed again with a blow. Enough ! I have not sought this separation—I would do anything in reason to prevent it. But stoop to wrong-doing, to the baseness, to the criminality you would have me—I will not ; and I accept the consequences of that determination. Let us part. Good-bye !”

Slowly, and steadily, but not unmoved, he made for the door, and passed out.

Mr. Erle and Jeffrey looked at him, but

did not speak—they remained as if aghast at his words and actions ; quite unprepared for resistance, they knew not how to meet it. Compliance and submission were intelligible, but actual opposition and defiance from a pale slight stripling—was it possible ?—commonly possible ?

“Ring for Collis,” said Mr. Erle, very pale and shivery—“let him take me to bed.” The old man was nearly fainting, and had to be carried to his bed in the adjoining room. He breathed with great difficulty, and there was the yellow ghastliness of a corpse about his face. But Jeffrey was too absorbed to notice it.

“A mistake,” he murmured; “I thought to draw out the nail, and I have clinched it! What to do next? And Sylvia!”

“Collis, put a light in the study, and the cigars, and the spirit-case.”

CHAPTER II.

A DEPARTURE.

OUTSIDE the drawing-room door Ned encountered Collis. He wore a confused, guilty look—perhaps he had been listening at the key-hole, and was disturbed by the sudden opening of the door.

“Was it coals?” he asked; but receiving no reply he turned and made good his escape downstairs. His yellow bald head with the cross bars of straggling locks on the top was a little flushed as he hurried into the kitchen. Ned mounted to his room on the third floor, and sat down on the little iron bedstead in the corner.

He was too hot, and fierce, and angry, just then, fully to appreciate his position—there was no room for sorrow in his heart. “They cast me off,” he said; “let me go as soon as I can.” There was no desire to linger—no thought of regret that his last hour under the paternal roof had come. “They never loved me—they never cared for me—sooner or later it must have come to this—as well now as at any other time. Henceforth, then, I am to have no father—no brother,” his eyes fell on the slight water-colour portrait over the mantel-shelf. He softened before the delicately featured, fair-haired, tender-eyed picture. It was all he had ever known of his mother. No one had ever spoken to him of her—there were no memories of her in the house. She had faded away like a sunbeam, leaving no trace. There was no one to say, This she did—*thus* she said—*that* was her footstool, *this* her chair. She was dead—he was her son—that was her portrait—the house

knew no more about them—cared to know no more !

“I have no brother, no father, no mother!” and he pressed his lips against the cold glass of the picture. He had never kissed her living lips, he had never looked into her living eyes, looking back their love. That poor picture was all he knew of her. Yet he loved her with all his soul—would have died in defence of her memory! “You are spared this, dearest!” he said; “it is perhaps better so; and yet, *you* approve my conduct, mother.” The hot tears came and drowned his sight—he turned and flung open the window. It was a relief to have the cool air blow in upon him, though the rain came with it, and pattered on his forehead, and wetted his hair.

He had formed no particular plan of action. Did not know exactly what he should do. He was possessed simply by the one idea—to quit as quickly as he could his father's house. “He bids me go—let me hence—any

where but here." He was stung by the injustice with which he had been treated; he flung away all tenderness for those who had behaved to him so cruelly. His heart was utterly hardened against them; and yet it was not with hatred. With anger?—yes, but in other respects more as though all feeling were dead. He was separated from them at their bidding; in his wrath he determined they should be humoured to the top of their bent. The separation should be wide indeed, and final and impassable. And his parting from home was the more easy, that home had never been connected in his mind with any special ideas of happiness. If it had been parting from Paul and Sylvia!

Still, it was an important step, to quit the house never to come back. And where should he go?—and what should he do? He sat on his bed and considered.

He felt in his pockets—took out all the money he could find, and counted it. The total was fifteen shillings: no great sum, but

still subsistence for some days, even if the worst came to the worst. He opened his dressing-table drawer: there were one or two slight articles of jewellery, not very costly; a gold shirt-pin; white cornelian studs set in gold, a present from Jeffrey on his birth-day a year ago; a ring, given him by uncle Paul when he sold his picture of the Horatii and Curatii; a slight gold chain. He packed these all up in his pocket-book. He thrust some clothes into a carpet-bag—yes, and, blushing as he did so, his dearly-beloved sketch-books, and a bundle of manuscripts. He was perhaps like Robinson Crusoe in the wreck—taking many things speculatively, not knowing whether they might or not be useful to him.

He looked again at the portrait, and stretched forth his hand to unfix it. Suddenly he turned pale.

“After all, are these things really mine?—may I take them?”

And he sank down again on the bed, much distressed.

"How weak and helpless I am!—and no one to help me, no one to care for me!"

He started, for there was the noise of some one at the door: he opened it.

"Oh, Mr. Hedwin, don't say as its true." Poor Sally Briggs crying bitterly, the red quite gone from her apple cheeks, and her sloe eyes dimmed and quenched by her tears!

"Why, Sally!"

"Oh, that Collis has been going on in the kitchen—oh, he made me sick almost, and he *do* go on a-crowing and chuckling, 'kicked out!' says he; 'cut off with a shilling!' But it isn't true, Mister Hedwin—oh, say as it isn't—there's a dear, say you're never going away to leave us all."

"Yes, Sally, it's true. I'm obliged to go."

"But you'll come back again, Mr. Hedwin."

"Never, Sally!"

"Oh, but you will—oh, boo!—hoo!—and there's his carpet bag packed up—and—and—" and the poor little servant gave way to a great burst of grief.

"Hush, Sally!" says Edwin, kindly. "Don't cry. Dry your eyes."

"Oh, please, let me do it. I can't help it."

"But don't make a noise, or you'll have Mrs. Beaver up."

This had some effect. Sally suppressed her more violent modes of grief.

"And then you won't be able to give me any assistance."

"Oh! can I assist you, Mr. Hedwin? Oh! please do let me—let me help you. I'll pack up your bag for you. And all your clean things have come home from the wash; and I mended all your socks yesterday, with my own 'ands. Wasn't that lucky now?"

"But stop, Sally. I don't know whether

I may take these things. I'm not sure that they're really mine."

"Not yours, Mr. Hedwin? Why, your name's marked on everything. Not yours? Who's then, I should like to know?" Ned paused.

"I've never earned a halfpenny yet of my own," he said bitterly; "and these are my father's property, I suppose; and I don't know that it's right to take them."

"Of course it is. Haven't you worn them? Aint they all given you, and marked with your name, and put away for you in your own chest of drawers with these very hands?"

Sally's arguments were so earnestly given they were irresistible, and she packed the carpet-bag neatly and dexterously. Ned was looking again at the picture. Sally's quick eyes perceived this, and she understood all about it in a second.

"Of course you'd like the painting of your poor dear ma—bless her! You're the

image of that picter. I always thinks so as I cleans the room." And she was folding it up in paper.

"No, Sally; that must be left behind." But she could see the tears in his eyes as he spoke.

"You'll excuse me, Mr. Hedwin; but you just look out a winder, and know nothing about it, if you please. It will just fit in here on this side of the bag; and if there's any talk, you know, why it was me as took it, and that's all about it; and I don't care who knows it; and they may try me at the Old Bailey for it, if they like, and hang me, and draw me, and quarter me. Who cares? I don't."

And she had her way—and Ned was touched by her kindness, but could say nothing, the whole business seemed so confused, and indistinct, and whirling. He felt hot and excited, and his eyes were very bright and his throat very dry.

"I wish it were all over, and the door

shut against me!" he muttered. Sally seemed to understand his looks—she could scarcely have heard his words.

"The bag's nearly ready;" and then, after a pause—"but don't you think it might be made up?" She was alluding, be it understood, to the family disagreement.

Ned had never thought of reconciliation. People don't often in the first half-hour of their wrath.

"No, Sally, it is not likely—it is not possible."

"It's a shame—there, I don't care who hears me say it—a right down burning shame!" She had finished the packing up now, and could do nothing less than give her anger the reins; it had been held in some time, chafing very much under the restraint, and had given precedence to business, but now would have its way. "Oh! it's 'orrid to think on. Why *are* people so cruel? Oh! my blessed Mr. Hedwin—to think of

your going away in this fashion! Druv out, it is; and aint they ashamed of themselves—leastwise they ought. And oh, what will the house be like without you, Mr. Hedwin! A 'ell upon earth. I'm sure it will. I won't stay. I won't—I won't! I'll give warning to Beaver this very night. This day month, mem, I leave you. Oh! Mr. Hedwin, what are they thinking about? Oh! it can't be true—it can't be true! It's a dream! Oh! please wake me!—pinch me, or a jug of cold water, or pulling the clothes off. I don't care which—I'm used to it!"

"Hush, Sally—compose yourself—it *must* be!" And he put his arm round her soothingly. Her grief was violent—but so real, it was hardly ludicrous. She was a little pacified, but still wept stormily.

"Suppose Mrs. Beaver should hear you." There was a calming effect about this suggestion. Sally thrust much apron into her mouth to quiet herself.

"And where did you think of going to, please Mr. Hedwin, if I may ask?"

It was real interest, not the slightest curiosity, prompting the question.

Ned was confused.

"Oh, don't be angry—don't now, Mr. Hedwin."

"I'm not angry—but—the fact is, I hardly know where I am going to."

"Oh, he's going away, and he don't know where! Oh!"

And Sally addressed an imaginary sympathetic and astounded audience in the ceiling.

"I shall find some friends I daresay," said Ned—perhaps a little shocked himself, for the first time, at the vagueness of his arrangements.

But Sally took little comfort from his words. Suddenly she dried her eyes fiercely with her fists, and started up.

"There's my aunt—a respectable widder woman as ever breathed—which lives at

No. 16, Pickard Place, turning out of Lamb's Cundick Street, Brunswick Square, and lets lodgings, ever so clean—never a bug found in that house, though the house next door swarms with them—and her husband a working upholsterer—Mrs. Minns her name is. Oh, if you should want a lodging, Mr. Hedwin, and would think of her, who I know as my own self would take care of you—and if her rooms was full knows better than most where good can be found—and please write her address in your skedge-book, and then you wont forget—and if you'd think to mention my name—”

“Thank you, Sally. I'll be sure to think of it. And now I'll go. I think I have everything now. Good-bye, Sally.”

“Oh, please don't, Mr. Hedwin, please. Oh, I'd so much rather you wouldn't.”

He kissed her, and pressed her hand. Such unexampled kindness was almost too much for the little woman, and blushes and

tears, and pleasure and grief, struggled on her face and in her bosom for supremacy. She kept a running accompaniment of lamentation and expostulation—a murmured music, broken now and then by sobs that snatched away her breath, and by tears that required sponging away with her fist.

“Kissed me, he did!—and I looking ever such a fright with crying and that, and my old cap on, and never so much as washed my hands for the occasion! The dear, and him going away—and what shall I do then? Oh!—”

And then with a sudden revulsion to the practical and the useful—

“Shall you want a cab, Mr. Hedwin?”

Ned checked his first impulse. No, he could not afford a cab.

“Shall I carry your bag for you, Mr. Hedwin—I am sure I would, anywhere.”

“No, thank you, Sally, it is not heavy. I’ll carry it myself.”

“Oh, but let me carry it for you down

into the 'all at any rate. Oh, please do, Mr. Hedwin."

He complied. Sally seized the bag, delighted to have an opportunity of serving her idol, and rushed precipitately downstairs. Ned followed slowly, meditatively.

Jeffrey came out of the study with a lighted cigar in his hand. He was pale and startled-looking, but he tried hard to appear calm.

"You're going, then," he said in a low tone to Edwin, who nodded assent. "A piece of romantic folly."

"You think so?"

"When will you come back?"

"Never."

Jeffrey started a little. There was something about Ned's firmness of character which, though he had enjoyed opportunities for contemplating it, he had never sufficiently appreciated or understood.

"I think you are wrong," said Jeffrey, in a more subdued tone.

"My father tells me to quit the house, and I obey him. You sided with him upstairs; you were with him in every word he spoke. Why am I wrong to obey what you both command?"

"You think I am your enemy."

"You did not stand my friend upstairs. You might have interfered between my father's wrath and me. You have power over him—he defers to you. Yet you would not step in, knowing in your heart that he was wrong and that I was right."

"I did not. I don't know so."

"Ask Sylvia."

Jeffrey grew paler still, and very angry.

"There is no need to drag her name into the discussion."

"Her name has been dragged into it already—not by me."

"Nor by me—nor by my fault. I know nothing of these scandals of the past. I wish to know nothing."

"You could stand by and hear them

discussed, and make no sign. Could hear Sylvia maligned, yet venture no word of contradiction. Well, well, she is not kin to you—she's not so dear to you, perhaps, as to me."

"And you will tell her all this, I suppose," sneered Jeffrey. "Trim it into a novel, that I, like a recreant, stood aside, and did not interfere in a matter I knew nothing about; while you, gallant knight-errant, plunged headlong in and struck about you—your father amongst others—and came out disinherited and cast off."

"I shall tell her nothing that will give her pain, be sure of that," said Ned, quietly.

Jeffrey looked relieved.

"I don't see that we need quarrel. If I can help you at any time I will do so; and if you choose to come back I will do all in my power to arrange matters."

"Thank you, Jeffrey. We need not be enemies, though we have never been friends."

"Shall you be in Lincoln's Inn to-morrow?"

"I don't know."

"Where are you going to now?—to Paul Foster's?"

"I don't know."

"Or won't tell," muttered Jeffrey.

"Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Collis was at the street-door, with a grin flickering on his face, though even he was somewhat moved and frightened at what was going on in the house.

"It's a dreadful wet night, Master Hedwin—oh, it *do* rain 'orrid!"

The young gentleman did not heed. He thought to himself, "I have been out in the rain before, at night too—out all night if it comes to that. They did not think when they were giving me the key of the street that they were educating me for this. Where shall I go?"

And he trudged on boldly, with his

carpet bag, through the pelting rain, out of the Regent's Park into the New Road. The adventurer and the wanderer always hasten to get out of the regions of respectability.

Soon after Collis was knocking at the study door.

"What's the matter?" cried Jeffrey.

"Oh, please, sir, could you come upstairs?—I'm afraid master's took bad."

Jeffrey flung away his cigar and mounted the stairs hurriedly.

"What's the matter, father?"

The old man was in bed. Very old and feeble he seemed now; very yellow against the white sheets, and a wild look in his eyes.

"Here, here, Jeffrey!" he cried, in a tremulous, husky voice. "Quick!—where is he?"

"Who?"

"Edwin—yes, yes, where is he?"

"Gone."

"Where to?—quick!"

"I don't know."

"The door shut just now. Did he go then?"

"Yes."

"And you let him go, and don't know where he has gone?"

"I thought—"

"Bah!"

He pushed away his eldest son, sank back on his pillow, and turned over on his side, trembling all over.

CHAPTER III.

"THE SUN IN THE SANDS."

THE lawyer, unlike the poet, is made, not born. The *fit* and the *nascitur* change places. He is a manufactured article, though the process of manufacture may be easy or toilsome, according to the suitability of the material employed. With regard to Mr. Septimus Rook I am inclined to think he was not of a very promising stuff for the composition of a lawyer. A rather raw young country gentleman, he had been suddenly transplanted from the open wilds of a northern province to the close streets of the capital—the bridle and whip taken out of his hands and a valuable commentary on the

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laws of his country by Sir William Blackstone thrust upon him in their stead. The change was abrupt and trying. All the ordinary ways of his life were closed against him, just as though they were being repaved—or there was wrong with the gas and water pipes. He was compelled to turn down by-paths. He was quite alone in London, living in furnished apartments in Araminta Row, Pimlico, and spending the official hours of the day in the chambers of Messrs. Fosket, Bishop, & Erle.

The story-teller is bound to make out a good case for his hero. To apologise for, to defend him if need be. But he is under no necessity to become a special pleader on behalf of all the *dramatis personæ*. Mr. Rook is not my hero. I don't undertake, therefore, to be his advocate. If his manner and habits of life were low, slangy, vulgar—so be it. I am not going to contradict, but I can understand that apologies could be made for him—although I refrain from

urging them. The fact is, and it's not a newly discovered fact, that everything may be looked upon in a favourable light, if we will only take the trouble to find the right point of view.

Mr. Rook's "old governor," as he termed him, was not illiberal in allowing pocket money to his son; and, possibly, had his habits been of a more studious and retiring character he might have got on very comfortably in town, even as an articled clerk, living in furnished apartments in Araminta Row. But he was not—he never had been studious or retiring. He never read a book; he was miserable by himself. He was as partial to "talk" as Dr. Johnson, though less particular than that gentleman in the subjects of his conversation. He was not "literary," and was deficient in general information; but was a constant subscriber to the *Sunday Ostler*—was well instructed in sporting matters—he even was acquainted with the mysterious game of "nurr and spell," played

well at billiards, liked pale ale, and smoked—I am not so sure that he liked—very strong tobacco from a dirty short pipe, in whose colour he took pride. In addition, as the reader knows, he was pleasant, frank, and good-natured.

Certainly the lodgings in Araminta Row were not of that inviting character that a man with his day's work finished would be in a hurry to repair to them for their comfort's sake. They were of the stereotyped order of lodgings; with the usual dirty-white muslin curtains—how fond is the lodging-house keeper of those torn, crumpled, straggling decorations!—the cheap and ugly wall-paper, the cruelly hard and unfeeling horse-hair covered sofa, the carrot-coloured, unripe mahogany table, and the incongruous prints—Hilton's "Angel releasing Peter," Hogarth's "March to Finchley," "The Eclipse stage-coach stopping to unskid;" the grim *silhouettes*, over the mantel-shelf of plain and departed relatives of

the lodging-house keeper, with a group of moth-eaten stuffed birds of dingy plumage in a cracked glass-case under the side-board. Mr. Rook did not find those rooms inviting. So the office hours over at Messrs. Fosket, Bishop, & Erle's, he dined at Fleet Street hostels—cheaply or expensively, according to the state of his remittance from Nottingly—and played at billiards—and smoked pipes, and visited singing meetings, and generally loitered about until it was time to take the last Pimlico omnibus and go home to Araminta Row, let himself in with his latch-key, stumble over the lucifer matches, and get to bed. He was well known to and appreciated by the driver and conductor of the last Royal Green omnibus from the city to Pimlico. The Royal Green did not, it is true, stop anywhere to “unskid,” but it often stopped to “beer” when Mr. Rook was a passenger; and on these occasions the functionaries of the vehicle partook of more refreshment and enjoyed more cigars

than was usual with or perhaps altogether good for them. For Mr. Rook was liberal with his money—loved applause, from no matter what quarter it might come to him—deemed it something to be called “a good sort,” even by an omnibus driver—and in fact would give anything to anybody, provided only that they would listen to and talk with him. On fine nights his favourite seat was on the box—in wet weather he was fain to retreat inside and put out his tobacco—unless there were but few passengers, and these acquiescent—the driver was of course an accessory—when he profanely blew his cloud even there, aggravating the customary frowsiness and ill-smelling of the carriage.

It was a wet night—there are often wet nights in London. Mr. Rook hailed the last Royal Green. He was comfortable—he had smoked a few pipes—emptied a tumbler or two of Irish whiskey-toddy—had played a successful game of pool—had tossed with a companion for a supper of toasted cheese,

and won the wager; he was inclined to defy the elements, and ride with the driver.

"It's as wet as a pond, you'd a deal better go inside," suggested the conductor.

"I'm wet to the skin, myself; one good job, it's our last trip."

"But I want to smoke, Tom; who's inside?"

"Only one, a regular customer, we shan't get many more such a night as this. Lord! ain't it coming down now!"

Mr. Rook stepped inside. There was one passenger—a lady, heavily veiled, quite at the other end. Mr. Rook whispered Tom; who whispered in answer—at least it was less whispered than hastily uttered—

"I dessey she wouldn't mind. Ask her. Bless you, she ain't so pertikler as that comes to."

"Have you any objection—do you think you should mind—may I—in point of fact—" he was always rather confused and hurried in addressing the gentler sex, and on this

occasion perhaps felt there was a little impropriety in the subject of his inquiry, but he went on, "May—I—in point of fact, smoke—go on smoking?"

"Oh, certainly, if you wish it."

"You don't mind—you don't dislike smoke?"

"On the contrary, I rather like it. Oh, there! how very silly of me!" cried the lady, suddenly, with a little start.

"What's the matter?"

"I've dropped my sixpence down in the straw."

"Let me help you to find it. Pray allow me."

Looking for a sixpence on the straw-strewn floor of a dark omnibus is not an easy or a brief employment. Mr. Rook went down on his knees, in spite of the earnest remonstrances of the lady, and patted the straw with earnest and extreme care; of course once or twice—it was very dark!—he could not help, accidentally of course,

patting the lady's foot, in the pursuit of the sixpence. The lady gave a little stifled scream when this happened—perhaps, too, a smothered laugh.

"I'm afraid I am giving you a great deal of trouble. I'm sure I'm sorry."

"Don't mention it, please," says Mr. Rook, patting away with renewed energy, and getting red in the face from his stooping posture, and the excitement of his efforts.

"How absurd!—how foolish! Dear me, I'm quite ashamed! How could I be so foolish? Here's the sixpence—it slipped into my umbrella!"

"That's all right!" and Mr. Rook came up from the straw, and resumed his seat.

But they could not fall back into their former position of silence and unacquaintance.

"I think—I'm not sure, you know—but I think that I have had the pleasure of seeing you before," said the lady.

"No! Have you?"

"You often return to Pimlico by this omnibus?"

"Well, I do, sometimes."

"You live—mind, I'm not sure—but I think—you live in Araminta Row."

"By George! How did you know that?"

"Ah!" said the lady, in a coquettish tone of voice. It was all Mr. Rook had to judge by, the tone of her voice, which was pleasant and musical enough; for the omnibus was so dark, and she was so heavily veiled, and so darkly attired, he could not define her features or person with any accuracy. "You see you are more known than you think."

"Well, it beats me quite! You know me? I don't think I know you, though."

"That may be. Yes, you live in Araminta Row—you sit in the back garden very often on Sundays—you read a sporting paper—I think—mind, I'm not sure—but I think it's the *Sunday Ostler*. You

wear a straw hat, with, oh! such a narrow rim, and a tiny little band of blue ribbon round it! You wear a shepherd's plaid shooting-jacket—oh! so short, and such large buttons!—and you smoke a little pipe, you call it a cutty, don't you?—like the one you hold in your hand. Ah! what with talking, and looking for my foolish sixpence, you've let it go out—quite out! Pray light it again!”

“No, thank you, I don't care about smoking any more. I'm staggered—I will say that.”

And Mr. Rook commenced to torture himself with surmises and suppositions as to who could be the lady in the veil.

“No,” she said, in answer to pressing inquiries on his part. “No, you don't know me in the least. I'm sure you don't. Though I know you, you see.”

“By George!” Mr. Rook went on, amazed. “Why, it's a sort of guardian angel business.”

"Yes, quite," and the musical laugh came in again. "I'm your guardian angel, that's how it is, only I've forgot my wings to-night, and so am compelled to come home in the last Pimlico 'bus, and lose my sixpence in the straw, carry a damp umbrella, and feel rather wet about the feet. Does all this correspond with your notions of a guardian angel?"

"She's getting one too many for me, I'm thinking," Mr. Rook murmured.

The omnibus stopped. It had reached its destination.

"Well, Tom, are you wet?"

"Reether!" And Tom shook himself, like a dog come out of water.

"What do you say to something?"

"I says all right. I'm wet out, but dry in."

Mr. Rook looked round. The lady was gone. She had paid, it seemed, and slipped away during his brief converse with Tom. He could just see a departing figure—an

ample skirt and umbrella, with a long shadow, cast by the gaslamp on to the wet, glistening pavement—she was many yards off already. The guardian angel was no longer watching over him.

“Who the deuce is she? I think something hot will be best. Well, Mr. Chinnery, how are you?”

“Good evening, sir. What’s it to be?”

“Brandy, I think. Three sixpennorths.” For the driver had lounged in, quite accidentally, and somehow stood at Mr. Rook’s elbow, quite convenient in case he should be asked to take anything; so it became necessary to order refreshment for three—a man so near could not well be overlooked—and he had claims.

“Well, it *is* a night!—I *am* wet!” There was no gainsaying this; so he got his “sixpennorth.”

“Here’s luck,” was the toast or sentiment muttered by all, as the hot, steaming stimulant was gulped down. Tom and the driver

put off a little from the bar, as though drinking were an occupation for which room was indispensable; and they got themselves into a sort of curved attitude over their rummers, and squared their elbows, bringing them almost level with their ears.

Meanwhile Chinnery, in his shirt sleeves, stood within his bar, grasping one of his ivory-and-gilt beer pump-handles in an attitude graceful for so stout a man, with a bland smile of admiration and dignified approval on his clean-shaved ample face. He had beetle-brows, and wore a massive black wig, and considered himself—and was, indeed, considered by a large circle of admiring friends—to be certainly striking-looking, if not regularly handsome. He wore a large diamond ring on the little finger of one of his hairy hands; also diamond shirt-studs, and a heavy gold chain, in a long festoon across his projecting stomach. He was fond of this attitude. I may say at once, that he had been connected

with the stage. Chinnery *was* a very well-known name on the northern circuit, and his *King Claudius* was thought by many to be a very fine performance. The *Wakefield Gazette* once said of his *Brabantio* that it was "intellectual, dignified, impassioned, glorious;" and at Bridlington he had been spoken of as "the gifted Chinnery;" and he copied Edmund Kean in attitude. Mrs. C. is the stout lady in black satin, with the cameo brooch, the scarlet necktie, and the Honiton lace collar. She was a "sweet Ophelia" once, but perhaps more celebrated for her singing chambermaids; of course, she was thinner then—indeed, her friends say that her figure *was* lovely. She was a daughter of old Siccombe, of the T. R. York, who was much opposed to her union with Chinnery, though he ultimately gave his consent, after the lovers had eloped and got married. Miss Laura Chinnery is the only child resulting from that union. She has not been educated for the stage; indeed, she

is too useful to her mother to be spared from the bar. She is little, pretty, pomatumed, with "six" curls gummed on to her rosy cheeks. She is admired and loved by many young gentlemen who "use" Chinnery's house, the "Sun in the Sands." The great moot-point with them is as to whether Miss Laura's roses are the result of art or the gift of nature, and they are continually daring each other to wet a finger and test the cheeks of Miss Laura. No one has yet presumed to settle this serious question; if the love of the lady does not hinder a solution, it is possible that the fear of her father may. For Chinnery is a muscular man.

A small figure in a shabby dress-coat, a parti-coloured comforter round his neck—it was rather a snake-like looking comforter, and it seemed to be coiled round him in a tight and painful fashion—with a broken, dirty, white hat, pushed through the swing-door to the bar. There was a cry of

"Hullo! Boss!"

"Three ha'porth, cold." And a thin, trembling hand slapped the money on the counter. He was a little, old man, with short-clipped iron-grey hair, a moist, inflamed eye, and a worn, crumpled, mottled face, red and blue with cold and exposure.

"Why, you're wet through, Boss," said Chinnery, dignified, but kindly, as he filled a wine-glass from a little bright brass tap.

Boss hissed out, in a creaking, theatrical voice—

"'Bid winter come and thrust his icy finger in my maw.
I ask cold comfort!'

"Cold!—ah! Wet!—ah! You're right there, Chinnery. Yes, I'll have another glass. 'For this relief, much thanks.' Ah! Mrs. C., divine goddess, I kiss thy hand!"

And the little old man blew kisses to the stout lady in the black satin, and took off his broken hat and pressed it upon that wet portion of his coat under which he pre-

sumed his heart to be, and turned his head upon one side until it nearly rested on his shoulder, and looked ecstatically out of the corners of his eyes.

"Don't be a fool, Boss. You'd best be off 'ome, and get to bed."

" 'How harder than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child !' "

Boss creaked out. Then turning to Tom, the conductor, he said, suddenly, "You remember the man at Newcastle who always would say 'toothless child.' Ah! what a lark it was!"

"It was—you're right there," responded Tom, chuckling, and shaking all over with laughter, while he violently pantomimed to Mr. Rook that he, Tom, knew nothing whatever about the story alluded to, but was only feigning acquiescence in, and affecting acquaintance with, the subject, for the purpose of humouring the old man, and drawing him out still more. "Ain't he a spree!"

"Who is he?" whispers Mr. Rook.

"Boss!"

"'Now the Queen drinks to Hamlet!'" continues the old man, draining his second glass. "Miss Laura, I love you! 'Here's to the maiden of blushing fifteen!' 'Believe me, if all those endearing young charms!' I take another, Chinnery. Yes; a bumper at parting!"

"You have took too much already, Boss. Don't give him any more, Chinnery. William, it's time to shut up."

"Let me have another—only one," begged the old man, "and I'll go through the whole of the banquet scene. I will, upon my soul! One more glass! I'll do it fine, with new scenery, dresses, and decorations;

'I drink to the general joy of the whole table,
And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss!'

And applauded by Tom, the conductor, and his comrade the driver of the Royal Green, who declared it was "the best joke he ever see—blow him, if it wasn't!" old

Boss raved about in a strained theatrical manner in front of Chinnery's bar.

"It's Boss," said Chinnery to Septimus Rook, confidentially; "Boss, formerly of the T. R. Covent Garden. Bless you, I've known him for years. Yes, it's drink 'as ruined him. That man was the best 'starved apothecary' as ever come on a theatre. He was. No; he couldn't do much beyond. He'd make believe as he could; but he couldn't, and he never did."

"What does he do now?"

"Oh, he hangs on at the Nonpareil—cadges there, you may say. Sometimes they let him go on for a small part, when he's sober—sometimes they don't. Or he takes the gallery checks. No, not the money—the checks. You see they'd be glad to help him if they could, being Miss Vane's father, and that."

"Miss Aurelia Vane?"

"No, not her father, Chinnery," the lady in black satin interposed, "she was Mrs.

Boss's daughter by her first husband, Baddock, who was playing low comedy at Tadcaster when we were both there—now many years back.”

“Go along with you, Liz. She wasn't Baddock's daughter; old Jim Baddock—I knew him well, played clown one winter at Carlisle, and dey-vilish well he did it too; only he broke his leg when that trap gave way. I was on the stage at the time. Two women fainted in the boxes. Lord! what a row there was!”

“Then whose child was she, I should like to know?” asked Mrs. Chinnery, sternly. “William, turn out the front gas. Laura, take money, fourpence out. Thank you, sir.” (Then in a whisper to her child)—“Have you sent out the beer to the policeman?”

“It's my belief, sir—and I know a thing or two about these matters—it's my belief as she's the daughter of old Bob Christie, the Harlequin—there! Thank you, sir—good night—much obliged.”

"Boss is very bad to-night," said Mrs. Chinnery; "if you're going his way, sir, perhaps you wouldn't mind giving a heye to him kindly. Poor old soul, it's a pity he should come to harm at his time of life."

"Where does he live?"

"Araminta Row."

"By George!" Mr. Rook kindly aided the veteran. It was not an easy task. But they had not far to go.

"What number, old 'un?" he asked.

"No. 12."

"By George!—next door. Then the lady in the bus!—I have it!—is the lady next door—and the lady next door is—Miss Aurelia Vane! By George!"

CHAPTER IV.

ONE OF US.

IN Burke's Buildings, St. Dunstan's Inn, on the landing on the third floor, stood Mrs. Giles, outside the door over which is inscribed the name of Smith. She was engaged in rubbing a tumbler clean with a towel. There was the sound of some one ascending the grimy, worn staircase.

"Who can this be?" murmurs Mrs. Giles.

"Is it for the second-floor? No—higher?—the third?"—then with loud inquiry, "Who's there? is it Tom Chivers?"

A slight young man bearing a carpet bag came up the stairs.

"No," she went on, "not Tom Chivers, by a foot's height, and a good many stun weight."

It was Mr. Edwin Erle.

"You is it!" said Mrs. Giles, as she recognized him, and continued her employment. "Well, truth is stranger than fiction any day, ain't it? Who'd ha' thought of seeing you again? Wasn't once enough for you? I remember you well—the younker with the half-crown—wonderful thing memory, ain't it?—how I do run on! Hullo! I beg your pardon, I didn't see it before—something's wrong, ain't there?—I'm sure there is, by your shivering and your white face—and ain't your eyes alight neither—oh, not at all!"

"Is he in?"

"Yes, he's in with Rackstraw, and Deverell, and Skeffington, and one or two more. I'm cleaning up the tumblers for supper—we haven't too many of them, and they're mostly cracked from biling water.

Why, my poor dear soul—you're wet through?"

"Never mind that. Can I see him?"

"Of course you can. I'll call him out. Don't be down-hearted, it will all be right in the end, you know—it always is. Besides, *they'll* cheer you up—they're a rum lot *inter noo*, you know, though I say it that shouldn't. Here, I'll have Newton out in a jiffy."

There was a great gush of noise and laughter, and a smell of smoke, and something very like toddy, as the door of the inner room opened. Newton Dax was soon on the landing.

"My dear David!"

"I've come, Goliah."

The words were very quietly spoken, but they made Mr. Dax look very hard into the face of his young friend.

"I'm very sorry, David—I'm very glad, David—you were quite right to come—give me your hand. I am all yours—your sure of

that, ain't you? Lord! how cold you are! Why, your teeth are chattering!"

"It's not all from cold, Goliah—my heart is beating very hard, indeed, and—how kind you are to me!"

They shook hands again, very fervently after this. Perhaps so fervently, as to bring tears into their eyes. Certainly tears *were* there. And Mrs. Giles—but this couldn't have been from their shaking of hands—retired to the furthest corner of the landing to wipe her eyes with the towel.

"Come in here, David. But, oh, how wet your coat is! You mustn't sit in that."

"The old room, I see. Just the same—I remember it all—the tiger skin—the sofa—the cavalry-sword."

"Yes, and the 'Continnence of Scipio' in the next room, the same as ever; well, a little older, David, that's all; though I may add, *dirty*. Shall I lend you a coat? Have you got one in the carpet-bag—sure? Empty it out on the sofa. Ah! sketch-

books! M.S. !—*the* poem is there, of course? Don't blush, David; we'll make a great fight with these weapons. Take off your boots, it does not do to sit in wet boots. There are some of *our* friends in the next room—you'll like them—they'll like you. Come along."

"What a disappointment!" quoth Tom Deverell, of the large moustache and twinkling eyes. "It's Newton Dax: I thought it was the oysters."

"Is this the way a host should be treated in his own house?"

"Call this a house! Audacious ostentation!"

"For shame, Deverell!—here's a friend: Mr. Edwin Erle, whom you know—a particular friend. Those people over there consist of Rackstraw, Skeffington—celebrated for his whiskers—Bowler, with the short pipe—Glossop, of the *Daily Bellman*, a deep thinker and drinker. Where will you sit? There are some more men there; I'll

tell you who they are when the smoke's cleared off."

"Really people ought to be ticketed," said some one. "It would save a great deal of trouble—like articles in a museum."

"Yes, or convicts at Pentonville."

"Sit here—there's plenty of room;" and Mr. Deverell gives a chair. "You remember me—the Nonpareil—the idiot-boy—the awful farce!"

"I call this a deadly swindle," says Mr. Glossop. "Our tumblers are taken from us, under the pretext that they need to be washed for supper; the bottles are removed, ostensibly to make way for oysters. Is this all a hollow sham? If it be true, as I suspect and believe, that there is no more liquor in the house, I call upon Dax to state it like a man."

"Isn't Glossop becoming rather a bore?"

"Some one talk metaphysics to him, and keep him quiet."

"I can bear anything but suspense."

"Tell him you thought his last article superficial."

"I'll bear martyrdom, if need be. I'll go home."

"Sober?"

"Don't add insult to injury—don't give me chaff when I want corn."

"You mean oysters?"

"I mean toddy. I hate imposture—I'm a serious man."

"And a heavy writer. Just some one slate Glossop's 'Gleanings from Space,' to occupy him."

Mr. Deverell started a difficulty. No one had read the book.

"How frivolous an objection! I'm surprised at you, Tom; a critic, too."

"An out-of-door sneer! Will some one give me a light? I read every book I review, nearly; at least I look at every page."

"Tom's growing conscientious. Perhaps it's time."

"There's plenty of conscience in reviewing, as you all know; and criticism generally is very well done, considering how poorly it's paid."

Mrs. Giles enters with a tray. A cry of satisfaction welcomes her. She slaps a table-cloth on the table.

"Go along with you!" says Mrs. Giles, speaking generally. "Get out! you don't care for me, it's what there is in the dish—loaves and fishes, bread and butter and oysters. Jest like yer—cupboard lovers, the lot of you; I never knew the man as wasn't. Deverell, my precious, give a hand to that cloth. I want some one to love me for myself alone—only I can't find him. Now, then, who says stout? If there ain't tumblers enough, some of you must drink out of the pewters—it won't be for the first time, I reckon—so I ain't going to apologize. Do pull the cloth straight, Deverell. *What* an eye you've got! Newton, bear a hand—he can't lay a cloth."

"Mrs. Giles," said Glossop, "I love you; if it wasn't for my many literary engagements I'd marry you to-morrow. Put the oysters near me, please."

"Wait for the cruets—do wait for the cruets. Bless the men, they're no better than cannibals; one would think they'd had no dinners nor no breakfasts! Yes, Rackstaw, my child, that's bitter beer, the one nearest to you. Why isn't Tom Chivers here? Ah, there's always someone who never comes."

"Here, David, gather the mollusca while you may, and drink the beer while there is any."

"There's plenty more outside," said Mrs. Giles; "oysters as well."

"Then bring them in!" (from Glossop).
"I like to see plenty. I like to think I'm not eating anyone else's share. I like a surplus, so that I can eat that too if it seem good to me. Bring them in, Mrs. Giles. I

have eaten a regiment of the fish, yet still I do battle."

"Wait a bit. I know you of old. You can eat oysters, and other things too—and drink besides. Wait while I cut bread and butter for the new comer—the youngster with the blue eyes that sits a-smiling on me as though he'd loved me all his life. And for you, Bowler? Thick or thin? They cut up your new book nicely in the *Weekly Hatchet*—didn't they? I was sorry to see it, though I own I laughed at the review. Will the good-looking party next you with the pinto moustachers, whose name I haven't the pleasure of knowing, but whom I respect just for all as though I did—will he like some bread and butter? Stout?—that's it, Newton—the pewter by Glossop—empty, is it? I'll soon get some more."

"What I like about the oyster," said Glossop, sententiously, in a bass voice, "is the great fact that he comes to one direct—asks for no introduction. He is the only

edible creature that is kind enough to dispense with the interference of the cook. We take him exactly as we find him, and eat him accordingly. Open his shell, and there he is—at home to all comers—cool, calm, succulent, invigorating, delicious, and filling at the price.”

“Sixpence a dozen, I believe,” remarked Mr. Dax.

“Then I must have eaten a good half-crown’s worth, I should think. Dear, how time flies, and money goes, and oysters disappear! But, to continue—”

“Are you going to be long?” asked Mr. Skeffington; “because if you are, I thin I’ll take a turn in the Strand.”

Glossop, with his hand, waved back thi impudent interruption.

“I love the oyster—”

“Oysters!” from the incorrigible Skeffington.

But Glossop heard him not.

“I love the thing that is mine at any

moment; that asks not for time to be dressed—to put on the rouge, and pearl powder, and crinoline of cookery—parsley and butter, white sauce, bread crumbs, gravy, and such trash. The oyster is always ready—ever presentable, and eatable.”

“Except in the dog days.”

But Glossop went on.

“There is a beautiful simplicity about that coming straight from the ocean to the table—just as a woman, confident that she is loved, doesn't stoop to heed whether her hair be smooth, or her brooch stuck even in her neck ribbon, but comes on the instant. Why, even periwinkles require to be boiled, and whelks insist on being pickled. I hate middlemen that step between us and our objects—cooks, and lawyers, and agents, and publishers.”

“And picture-dealers,” said Mr. Dax, ruefully.

There is an end to all things. There was an end at last to the supper of Mr. Dax

and his friends. The oysters gone, the shells were removed; and soon the fumes of tobacco and the odours of whiskey again pervaded the apartment.

"And now to business," exhorted Tom Deverell.

"What business?"

"The *Trumpet*."

"Ah, well. The *Trumpet*—go on. Newton, give me a light."

"The *Trumpet* will be an organ—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Mr. Skeffington, "is it correct to say that the *Trumpet* will be an organ? I don't see how a trumpet can be an organ—but perhaps I'm wrong."

"We don't want the whole prospectus," said Mr. Dax. "I presume that's quite the usual sort of thing. Of course your 'endeavour will be to combine instruction with amusement.'"

"I hate instruction!" broke in Mr. Skeffington.

"I hate amusement!" cried Mr. Glossop.

"But happily you two gentlemen do not comprise the whole British public."

"Of course 'there will be nothing to shock the taste of the most fastidious.'"

"O dear, no—nothing; we shall endeavour to suit all tastes: there will be romance for the drawing-room—"

"And poetry for the back-kitchen. Yes, I see the sort of thing. There will be patterns of babies' socks in it, and crochet collars for the women, pictures of aquariums, arithmetical puzzles, advice on the culture of black-beetles and the cure of corns. Somehow," and Mr. Skeffington mixed another tumbler, "I don't think it will be intensely amusing. I suppose you won't report the fights? I'm afraid you're all getting too respectable."

"Have no fear, my dear Skeffington," said Tom Deverell, bowing politely, "while you are with us our respectability is made safe indeed. Our publication will be for the general public; we must endeavour to

make our contents generally interesting. The column you will yawn over—”

“I shall yawn over more columns than one.”

“Will be read with avidity by others; while the pages which may gratify you—I mean those containing your own contributions—may seem slightly tedious, and frivolous, perhaps, to myself and our friends here—and, perhaps, the great public outside—we shall see. My duties will be chiefly editorial—though I *may* publish a novel in the *Trumpet*.”

Loud cries of “Oh!”—Mr. Deverell bowing, as though acknowledging homage.

“But there will still be room—plenty of room. Mr. Glossop has undertaken the dead-weight articles. The pages of sound solid reading—which no one reads—with the queer diagrams which no one understands, but which give such respectability and tone to a publication.”

“I know the sort of thing,” said Skeffing-

ton: "portraits of sponges and hair-brushes, and insane insects, and absurd fish—doosid interesting!"

"Scoffer at science! Peace!" interposed Glossop, in deep tones. "I have promised a second series of my admirable papers on the Physiology of Chaos. I shall endeavour—I say, I shall endeavour to be flimsy, to suit the tone of the paper."

Mr. Deverell continued:—

"Our friend Newton will favour us with some delightful stories of tiger hunting in the Upper Provinces."

"Of which I don't believe a word," said Glossop. "I feel sure myself, that the skin in the next room was bought at the furrier's in Regent Street."

"He will also narrate episodes from his gallant career in India; with particulars of his single combat and ultimate friendship with Dost Mahommed."

This announcement was greeted with incredulous applause.

"Skeffington will write cockney light literature; if he is very good there shall be a portrait of his whiskers in an early number. Rackstraw will contribute comic verse, and is engaged for general business. There will be sentimental poetry by a lady."

Cries of "Name!—name!"

"I'm in the secret," cried Skeffington.
"It's Mrs. Giles!"

"No, it is *not* Mrs. Giles. More I may not say. The *Trumpet*—price one penny—will be published weekly."

"Have you got money, Tom?" inquired Mr. Glossop, with some anxiety.

"Our pecuniary arrangements are entirely satisfactory. We have secured a capitalist."

"That's all right. There is never any difficulty if you go the right way to work. There are plenty of capitalists about—that's one thing—they want a little courting—like women—and a little adroitness, and a firm hand—like fly-fishing. But there is a capitalist at the corner of every street. There

is a capitalist in every omnibus. And the great anxiety of the capitalist is to drop his money. He is positively grateful to any one who will show him how to do this. You mustn't frighten him—that's all—and mustn't make his ruin appear too sudden. I never knew any scheme that was too mad for a capitalist to take up. I believe the madder the venture the more he likes it. However laboriously he has made his money, he finds it a bore when he's got it, and he is thankful to anyone who will rid him of the ponderous plethora. Fortunately, such people abound. Instance, I am one;" and Glossop struck his chest.

"There are a few more questions we must at present, I fear, leave open. As to illustrations, I am in the hands of our art-friend, Newton; a thriving painter—as you all know—who, for that great work on the wall, received the gold medal from the hands of the President of the Royal Academy in—what year was it, Newton?"

Mr. Dax rose up.

"I *was* an artist. I *did* get the gold medal. I'm open to a bid for the 'Continence of Scipio.' I accept the art-administration of the *Trumpet*. I introduce to the staff one of the chief illustrators." He flung a sketch-book on the table. "Look at that, Mr. Editor, that's something like what we want. And now, tumblers all round, and drink to the health of my friend—your friend—one of *us*—the artist of the *Trumpet*—one penny, weekly—Mr. Edwin Erle!"

"I'll work heart and soul for the cause, Mr. Editor," says Ned, shaking hands with Tom Deverell, and acknowledging the greeting from all sides. "My pencil, and all I can do with it, is at the service of the *Trumpet*—one penny, weekly, illustrated."

"The sketches are very good," says Glossop, looking over the book. "I like a new hand, — fresh blood. It gives a spirit to a thing. He shall illustrate my 'Physiology of Chaos.'"

"It's three o'clock," cries some one.

"It's four."

"We'd better go," remarks Tom Deverell, "or the Chair will slip under the table. We've got through a good night's work. Newton, you've been abstemious. I congratulate you. Four o'clock and sober—almost. Really there is always hope. Good night.

"Good night, and success to the *Trumpet*, for my sake."

"And mine," cry many, Editor inclusive.

"And mine," says Edwin Erle.

"To rest, David. No more talk to-night, or I shall want to take hold of that black bottle; and I know I'd better not. Never mind details now. We'll deal only with effect now, and leave cause for to-morrow's consideration. You are here, and I'm glad indeed to see you—that's enough for to-night; and you've done one good deed already, though you don't know it—you've

kept me sober. I shall have a less headache to-morrow, that I might have had after such a party, you not here. Sleep, my dear David. They are good fellows all, David, affecting to be more Bohemian than they really are; but such is their humour. *I*, as you know, have no cause for affectation on the subject. And they work hard, when they *do* work, which is pretty often. Rest, David; we'll make a more comfortable bed for you than last time; for there is a truce to the feud with the washerwoman at present. Good night. I shall have another pipe; but not the black bottle, I assure you—not if I can possibly help it.”

CHAPTER V.

A CUPBOARD IS UNLOCKED.

"THE key of the street for life, Goliah—that is what it means. Not for one night merely, but for ever!"

"For ever!"

"Yes. I dreaded it once. I would have done anything to have avoided it once—all but the thing they asked of me. So the key is mine for life. It was threatened me a long while. It has come. I dread it no longer."

"But why has this been, David?"

"I must say hard things in telling you—harder things than should fall from my lips.

Perhaps my home has been a home only in name. I have been little cared for. My mother died at my birth." His voice faltered here. "I was pampered as a child, crushed as a boy—I suppose I may hardly yet say a young man. As a baby, I was regarded as an amusing toy, to be brought down now and then for the amusement of the parlour, at dessert time, during digestion of dinner. I suppose my father tired of this. A boy of seven, I was sent to school—to a school where there were no holidays. I ran away twice; made my way to town, on foot, from Devonshire; and was taken back and flogged. Yes, Goliah, flogged—and it hurt me a good deal, though I would have died rather than have cried out. I suppose my father also tired of that plan at last, and he had me home. It made little difference to him; for he was well then, and always out, and at the club. I seldom saw him. I had a tutor at home; and I went to Paul Foster's to watch him paint, and

play with my cousin Sylvia in the back-yard in Jowland Street. Paul often gave me a lesson ; he was always kind."

"Paul Foster taught you?"

"Yes ; in his strange, desultory way—singing over his canvas and stalking about his studio. Was it a wonder that I, too, longed to be a painter? I have told you this before, have I not? Of course, in Gloucester Terrace my notions were laughed at, my pretensions scorned. I persisted. Then came the threat of the key of the street, for life. I was frightened. I gave in. I went to the office in Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"Was that not enough, David?"

"No ; I was not yet sufficiently a prisoner, it seems. I was told to give up Paul Foster and Sylvia."

"But why?—what had they done?"

"Indeed it is not easy to explain, Goliah. It was suggested that the acquaintance interfered with my duties in the office of Foskett, Bishop & Erle. It was not only

that. There has never been much friendship between my father and Paul Foster, though they married twin-sisters—though their children are cousins. They have always kept apart—meeting as seldom as possible. No hatred, perhaps, between them; but certainly no friendship. And then my father—I sometimes think he was not in his right senses—he—he allowed himself to speak cruelly, most cruelly, of Sylvia's mother."

Mr. Dax rose from his seat.

"And you, David?"

"Denied it!—firmly, fiercely even!"

"And then?"

"I am here, Goliah. You know the whole story."

"Never to return?"

"Can I go back to hear again this? Oh! it cannot be true, Goliah! To have this flung at me, at them, again! Go back, and give up friends who have been so true to me! There is no going back!"

"And you came here straight from Gloucester Terrace?"

"Yes. I had some faith in you, you see. Besides, I could not go to Jowland Street. Paul would have been too amazed—Sylvia frightened. It was late at night."

"And had I been from home?"

"I was prepared for that even. You remember Covent Garden Market and the wet night—or should I say morning?"

Mr. Dax pulled about his orange beard, and tattooed upon the floor.

"I must have the hookah out, David, and smoke over all this—for somehow it makes me feel rather giddy. No, traitor, it is not from the whiskey of last night, though I am willing to own to a slight headache on that account. I think you have done rightly, David—I am sure you have. I am sure you could not do else. But don't harden your heart against Gloucester Terrace. He is your father after all; and old—is he not?—and ill. Be reconciled

if you can ; one's father *is* one's father. I will talk to you more when I have smoked more over the subject. Meanwhile, you are here, my most honoured guest, and come what come may, we'll do some great things together, in both art and literature, if you like. My head does ache terribly I admit. Will Mrs. Giles never come with the soda-water? What's one bottle after an evening of many tumblers? How did you like last night?"

"I enjoyed it extremely. I thought Tom Deverell was splendid."

"He is a great dog is Tom ; true as the sun, and as bright."

"And Skeffington was very amusing."

"Skeff affects the swell and the idle Bohemian. He is really a hard-working honest fellow enough. We'll make the *Trumpet* sound between us. Have you ever drawn on wood? It's very easy. We'll get a few blocks, and I'll soon put you in the way. Did you like Glossop? He is

really soundly scientific, I believe, although fond of oysters and beer, and, for that matter, toddy. Altogether it was, perhaps, rather an outpost of the great literary camp that you made acquaintance with last night—a detachment of skirmishers—something of a Zouave pattern—who have lost a little of the respectability which distinguishes headquarters and the main body of the army. Not but what they're all right enough—hard up, it may be, though that's hardly a reproach—or if it is, it attaches considerably to a gentleman of the name of Newton Dax. You see, David, I don't want you to get hold of the notion that literature is a sort of lost profession, and that authors are perpetually smoking strong tobacco and drinking toddy, and eating oysters, in back attics; though one or two of us—I could mention names if I chose—may do it now and then. Ah, here comes Mrs. Giles, with soda-water No. 2."

"Yes, here I am again! It was a wet

night, wasn't it, Newton? I can see that by the bottles—and a long one, I've no doubt; but you're not so bad as I thought you would be. How's my young friend with the blue eyes?—fresh as a lark, ain't he? Did you like the bloaters?"

It was mid-day. The gentlemen on the third floor in Burke Buildings had risen late after the entertainment on the previous evening. Mrs. Giles had prepared a sufficient breakfast, but Mr. Dax's appetite did not trouble him very much in the morning. He continued:

"Literature is sound enough, and gentlemanly enough, and healthy, and no more signifies, as, of course, late hours and dissipation, and too much toddy, than does law, or physic, or divinity. Because now and then a liner is found in the gutter, it doesn't do to cry shame on every man that wields a pen. I must smoke again. It seems to me I'm getting to live on smoke. Your sketches are admirable, David." Mr. Dax

was turning over the pages of the book. "Who's that?" he asked, suddenly, stopping.

"A sketch of Sylvia Foster."

"I recognize it—and it's like her."

"Yes, I think so; a little more severe, perhaps, than she looks generally."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Dax, in a low voice, "very like the water-colour drawing in the carpet-bag."

"My mother's portrait! Yes, there is a likeness. Strange that the twin sisters, Gabrielle and Désirée, my mother and Sylvia's mother, should have both died so young."

"Poor things!" murmured Mr. Dax; "the children should be drawn to each other by that if by nothing else."

There was a silence for some minutes, Mr. Dax puffing hard at his hookah.

"Let us look over the MSS., David," he said at length; "we agreed to hold an inquest on your literary bantlings after break-

fast. What's this?—‘*The Necromancer*,’
a tragedy in five acts. Hum—well, no—
perhaps we needn't inquire into that.
What have we here?—a book of verses,”
and he commenced reading in sonorous
tones,

“To love is easy in the hour
Of joy's own harvest: when upheaves
Life's laden field, 'neath precious sheaves
Of happiness in golden store.

When joy, faith, youth go hand in hand,
Three jewels in one diadem,
Three roses grafted on one stem,
Three nereids dancing on the sand.”

“My reading wounds your ear—I know it
does. Go on yourself; you've a better voice
for love poetry than I have.”

Ned took up the song.

“To love with hope's horizon marred
By darkling mists of doubts and fears,
And sorrow clouds that rain sad tears,
To love unloved,—this—this is hard.

A star upon an iceberg shining,
A soft bird cresting a black flood,
A sun-beam playing upon blood,
A serpent round a myrtle twining.

To love—the riven heart down pressed
 'Neath hope's poor corse—livid and chill,
 Even as a mother doats on still
Her babe stone-dead upon her breast."

There were other verses of like pattern.

"They're not bad," said Mr. Dax, when David had finished; "I recognize the model, and can understand the admiration that has led you to follow him. Hollo!—"To Aurelia!"—I won't ask who she is. Read a bit of that."

Edwin recommenced.

"Thou lov'st me not! Yet surely once I read
In the mysterious midnight of thine eyes
Some smiling rays upon my hopes out-shed,
Some seeming pledge of kindled sympathies.
Oh! as the brain-enmaddened sorcerer sees
On the blank surface of the crystal lying
A future, radiant with felicities—
So all his fevered fancies far out-vying,
Up from thy glance I conjured dreams of joy undying."

"Hullo, David, is that real passion, or make-believe? Read these lines about *Night*."

"The night came pall-like down ! the river cowered
And curdled in its fear, and shrank oppressed
At the Egyptian darkness that o'er-lowered ;
As 'neath a weight of crime the human breast
Sinks sickened back and hopeless, seeks for rest,
Relief, and peace. While ever yet the more
The weight down weighs, nor heeds the idle quest !
Drugged by the gloom, the waves all voice gave o'er,
Save where they humbly licked the sandals of the shore.

"The stars were few ; and those with timorous shiver ;
Poor spies thrown out by hosts of hidden might
Watching their wan reflections in the river,
Were startled at the weirdness of the night,
And shone with weak and intermittent light,
And seemed as children by a goblin cowed ;
While buffetting about with impish spite
Chill, raining gusts surged in a struggling crowd,
Warred current against current, battled cloud 'gainst
cloud."

Ned read the lines with much earnestness
of tone, and in a musical, sympathetic voice.

"I don't know which is best, David—the
verse or the reading. But—"

"You mean they're not good, Goliath.
You don't think I've any poetry in me.
You don't like the lines?" and Ned red-
dened.

"I mean nothing of the kind, poet ; I

think the verses good—there!—be satisfied on that point. Only I look upon poetry as an expensive luxury, rather out of the reach of a poor literary man. Do you understand me, David? We have to look at things practically, to get a living out of literature—and poetry does not pay.”

“I see. Yes, first a living—let me be no incumbrance to you or anyone; let me be independent, let me earn my living.”

“You shall, David, as soon as possible—for the sooner the happier you will be.”

“Shall I tear up the rhymes?”

“No, cruel boy, keep them. I don’t want you to play Brutus and destroy your own offspring. They’ve cost you many a sigh, many a teasing hunt after a rhyme; but they’ve given you many a pleasure. Besides, never tear up MS.—make it a rule. It can always be made available somehow some day. And now, what’s this other bundle? Hullo!—a comedy in three acts—from the French, I suppose?”

"No, Mr. Goliah, it is not."

"Original! dear me, you're a young dramatist, David. '*King, Queen, and Knave.*' Hum!—'Scene: the Œil de Bœuf, Versailles. Enter the Comte de Brissac. 'But if I love you, Rosalie.' 'But you do not, Eugene.' 'Nay, hear me swear!' 'Stay, the King is here.' It doesn't seem very bad. Perhaps if we could knock it into one act—"

"Goliah!"

"I know it sounds cruel, and you feel like a tall man getting into the Procrustean bed. But there are chances against a three act play, particularly from new men. Managers are very shy of them—they are always shy—but a new man with a long new play—oh! if it had but been in one act—"

"Do what you like with it. If it doesn't seem to be practicable any way, perhaps I have one or two more plays here, that stand a better chance. We must make money,

Goliah—isn't that the right cue? How shall I begin? What am I to do?"

"You're in a desperate hurry. You're determined? Well, then, look here. I've two or three jobs in hand. Here are books for review; you can look at them, and give an opinion upon them. They're for the *Twaddler*, and we don't abuse anything in the *Twaddler*, for fear of losing advertisements—so bear that important fact in mind in arriving at an opinion. This is a long business I have to do—pay bad, but certain—lives of men of art and letters for a new Biographical Dictionary. You can go in for it if you like—I've done as far as B. Here are books of reference to work it from, so you needn't go to the Museum. We'll divide the profits equally—of course we will, isn't the labourer worthy of his hire? When you get tired you can amuse yourself with designing a wrapper for that new and important work the *Trumpet*, one penny, illustrated."

"So he has something to occupy him," said Mr. Dax, as he strode into the adjoining room. He closed the door behind him. He went to the mantel-shelf, on which rested the water-colour drawing taken from Gloucester Terrace—the portrait of the dead Gabrielle. He gazed at it long and earnestly. He turned away at last—his tall figure drooping, his eyes tearful, his lips quivering, a strange wild look of suffering on his blanched face. He seemed to have aged a good ten years quite suddenly—all gaiety of manner was gone from him. He groped his way to the window, almost as a blind man might have done. He flung the casement open.

"Yes," he groaned, "it is her very image! Is she herself! What a fool I have been not to have seen it before—not to have known that the charm he exercises over me—the look, the voice, the gesture!—yes, I can find *her* in them all. I might have known it from the first. What else could so have

won me to him. Love can survive all, then—not even the shame and folly of my wretched broken life can efface or crush it, or drive it away!” And he hid his face in his great, muscular, trembling hands. Oh, Chalonese sketch of the dead Gabrielle, is all this thy doing?

“It is still here, aching, and wounding, and tearing, as of old—long, long years ago. The tide out, I can still see the rock on which my life was wrecked, breaking through the surface of the waters. Long, long years ago! I thought the old, miserable, ruinous love was dead, when it did but sleep.”

He rocked about like one restless from pain.

“It has all come back to me. It has brought me to *this*. Yet still it does not quit me. This life, this garret, this”—and he surveyed his wan face and tangled hair in the glass—“and all the stupid wrongdoing, the idiotic sin of my life. And yet it

haunts, and burns, and tortures me! Poor dead twins!—poor living orphan children, brought now so near to me! Let the waters come in again!—let the rock be hidden!—let me laugh, forget, and—and—” He went to the black bottle on the mantel-shelf, beside the drawing of the dead Gabrielle.

So, even behind Mr. Dax's jovial presence, and hearty manner, and loud laugh, lurked a cruel sorrow. Hid deep in his heart, as he deemed it, perhaps—tied down tight with clasps, and clamps, and fetters—bolted and trebly locked—it did but need accident to touch the spring and all the work was to be done again—the grief was as free, new, fresh, and tyrannous as ever! In truth, where on this earth does sorrow not lurk? There are aches at the back of the most delightful smiles. The most becoming drapery may but hide dead bones. Whited sepulchres are necessities of social decency. Fortunately, pain is never perpetual. Sleep

must come, or forgetfulness or cessation ; or—best cure of all—death ! Let us laugh, then, while we may—while our enemy is absent and seems to have forgotten us. It will be time enough to weep when he returns. Because there is to be one black hour in the twenty-four, may we not enjoy the other twenty-three ?

His sorrow far from him, Mr. Dax disported himself pleasantly—his grief at hand, he sunk down before it, as we have seen. And perhaps there are many others of mankind who can laugh, and talk, and be merry, and eat oysters, and empty tumblers—and yet perforce must, now and then, yield themselves prisoners to a dreadful woe !

“Goliah, come and look at the design for the cover to the *Trumpet*—one penny weekly, illustrated.”

Mr. Dax rose up and shook himself.

“At least I will be true to him !” he said.

“David, I think the design is capital.”

CHAPTER VI.

A DECLARATION OF LOVE—OR OF WAR?

LATE in the evening there was heard a loud knock at the street door of the house in Jowland Street in which resided Paul and Sylvia Foster. They were sitting, not in the studio, but in the room adjoining. Paul had been reading Lempriere's Dictionary, and had sunk back asleep. Sylvia was employed in darning a pair of grey worsted socks, the property of the painter. She had stopped now and then in her task to glance at her father. He was sleeping heavily—breathing loudly. Once she had risen from

her chair and kissed him, smoothing the hair from his forehead ; but this had been done so softly and tenderly, that he had not been disturbed by it--had not even moved. She had been thinking, as he reclined in his chair, frowning in his sleep, that he looked paler, and older, and more worn, than she had ever before seen him look ; perhaps the irresistible desire to kiss him was born of that thought. Then came the knock at the door. Sylvia started up ; but the noise did not awaken the sleeper. Sylvia went to the door of the room and listened. Who could come there knocking so loudly so late at night ? She heard a voice whose tones she recognized. Some one came hurriedly up the stairs.

"What is the matter, Jeffrey ?" she said.
"Hush ! Don't make a noise ! Polly is asleep."

"I want to speak to *you*, Sylvia."

"Hush ! Not so loud ! I don't think Polly is quite himself to-night. I should

not like him to be disturbed. Come into the painting-room."

She led him into the studio. The gas was still alight, only turned down low; for Paul was in the habit of entering the studio the last thing at night before he retired to rest, in order to have a final inspection of his day's work. Sylvia looked at her companion in the dim light. A certain strangeness in his appearance struck her forcibly.

"What is the matter?" she repeated.

"Where is Edwin?" Jeffrey asked, in a harsh, angry voice.

"I don't know."

"Where is Edwin?"

"I have told you, Jeffrey, that I don't know."

"Who should know if you do not?"

"Should not you? But why are you so angry? Tell me—what has happened, Jeffrey? I did not mean to offend you. I know nothing of Edwin—he has not been here these three days. *Has* anything hap-

pened to him? Do you fear anything?—do you suspect anything has? Tell me, Jeffrey!”

She was trembling with anxiety. She still held Polly's grey sock in her hand, and was twisting it round and round, as though she were wringing it. Jeffrey gazed at her sternly—almost savagely—for a few moments, and then turned away his eyes.

“I do not fear anything,” he said. “He is safe enough, I daresay. For all I know—or care—I mean, I hope he is. I have no doubt he is. But—he left Gloucester Terrace three days ago.”

“And has not been there since?”

“No.”

“Nor to Lincoln's Inn Fields?”

“No.”

“Why did he go?”

“I don't know—a freak, I suppose—one of his usual romantic whims.”

“You *do* know, Jeffrey. You know

more than you like to tell. It was not a freak—not a romantic whim ! ”

He looked rather guilty under the probing glances of her lustrous hazel eyes.

“ He excited my father by contradicting him. My father is, as you know, an invalid, and should be humoured. Edwin’s foolish conduct drove the old man into one of his furies. He ordered him out of the house.”

“ And he went ? ”

“ He was silly enough to do so. There was no necessity for it.”

“ Never to return ? ”

“ Oh, they both used angry words to each other—it was a great piece of folly altogether.”

“ And you, Jeffrey, were you present ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And what did you do ? ”

“ What could I do ? What command have I over Edwin ? Do you think he would keep his mouth shut at my bidding ? ”

“ You have influence with your father.

You could have interposed to stay this quarrel. Surely you *did* interpose, Jeffrey?"

"Stand between two combatants to be beaten by both? Not I."

"For shame, Jeffrey! Why will you do yourself such injustice? Why persist in putting your conduct in the worst light? You have not told me all."

Jeffrey looked on the floor. Certainly he had not told her all.

"And now?" Sylvia asked.

"Now, I am here—I had almost forgotten why; but," he went on in a low, trembling voice, "I forget everything when I am near you, Sylvia." A pause—then, in a calmer voice, "My father has been taken very much worse this evening—a sudden seizure of a dangerous nature!"

"Dangerous?"

"Very dangerous! He is so weakened by prolonged ill health, I fear the worst. He is extremely ill. He has taken medicine that has, I am afraid, affected his brain.

He is almost raving—cries for Edwin—thinks we are intentionally keeping him away. I left him in a paroxysm that was almost insanity.”

“I am very sorry, indeed, to hear this, for Edwin’s sake—for yours, too, of course, I mean, Jeffrey—I beg your pardon.”

“Sylvia, you will drive me mad! You know—you must know how—Why is Edwin to be everything with you—no one else worth a moment’s thought? Why are all your cares, hopes, sympathies, all to be his—none for any one else?”

“He is my cousin,” said Sylvia, faintly.

“Bah! You will not put me off with that shallow pretence. What signifies relationship after all? Remember a question I once asked you in this room.”

“I do remember,” and she involuntarily clasped her wrist.

“Remember your answer!”

“I remember that too. You had no

right to ask that question. You have no right to quarrel with the answer."

"Right or wrong, I quarrel with it, because it was false! You *do* love Edwin!"

She made no answer to this. But the colour went from her cheeks—from her lips.

"You *do* love Edwin!" Jeffrey went on, fiercely; "and he 'loves again'? Do you think it? Undeceive yourself. He has a passion for another! Do you know that, Sylvia?"

She pressed her hand upon her heart, and seemed to breathe with difficulty; but she did not speak.

"Another is preferred to you. Who? An actress, Sylvia. Do you know that? An actress."

"I know all about it," she said calmly, in a low voice. "An actress at the Nonpareil—Miss Vane. I have seen her. I think her very beautiful. Now, have you anything further to tell me, or have you

finished? I think I know quite as much about Edwin as you do, though you are his brother and I am only his cousin ; and you need not trouble yourself to say anything in detraction of him again—not to me, at anyrate !”

She glanced at him proudly, defiantly. Jeffrey bit his lip ; he passed his hand over his forehead, as though in pain ; then, after a pause, said, in a changed voice,

“ You are very cruel to me, Sylvia—very cold and harsh. Surely more so than I deserve. If you could only see into my heart. I would do all man could to serve you, Sylvia!—will do so—though there is never to be for me one kind look, or word, or thought.”

There was something so pitiable in his tone it could not fail to touch her. She approached him—she took his hand.

“ If I have pained you, Jeffrey—” But he snatched away his hand angrily.

“ Yes—if you have pained me, you will

give me sorrow, pity, compassion! What are these to me? You will offer me friendship, perhaps—when your heart is given to another! *When I am hungry and thirsty for your love, do you t'ink that friendship will quench or satisfy me?—or pity, or sympathy?* Sylvia, do you need to be told it now, that you are more dear to me than anything in the world? You know this—you must have known it; but if it needed to be said in plain, direct words, it is said now—*I love you!* I have kept this close in my heart, and folded my arms over it, and fought with it, and held it down with my whole force: but it has been too much for me—it has bitten its way to the light! Now,” he cried, bitterly, “enjoy your triumph—your revenge—Edwin’s revenge! I love you! And you? I know there is no echo in your heart to my love!”

“Indeed, Jeffrey,” Sylvia began, softly; but he stopped her with an angry stamp of his foot.

"Do you think it has cost me nothing, this love? Do you think it has involved no sacrifice?—that I have drifted into it willingly?—have slid in it upon an oiled groove? Bah! Hear the truth! I have disputed its progress at every step! I have wrestled with it for every inch of ground! Do you dream, for one moment, that *you* are the woman it has been my ambition to love and marry?—that any ideal of passion I have formed has once linked itself with you? These are not lover's words, very likely. I don't know. I am trading upon no experiences. I have not studied how passions are reared and expressed, and made, by art and effort, successful! I have never loved before: never had a passing fancy that could be, in any way, twisted into anything like love. A year ago I could as soon have conceived myself to be lying dead at your feet as standing here talking thus to you! I may have thought of marriage as a means of social advancement, a gain in position—

of marriage with some noble lady, who would aid my ambition—who would be a help-meet for me—whose grace, and beauty, and wit, and splendour, should ever be an ornament, and a grace, and an attraction, to my home! Do you think *you fulfil* any of these requirements? What do I gain by mad love for, by absurd marriage with, the poor daughter of a miserable painter? What are you to me, after all, that I should love you?—yet it seems there is a fate in these matters. Something beyond all human control—at least beyond mine. And I love you, Sylvia, with all my soul! I will marry you, Sylvia! I will do all man can to make you happy! I will go to the world's end to please you. I shatter all my old ambitious dreams at a blow! Perhaps," he added, mournfully, "they are already shattered for me. Sylvia, do you hear me?"

"Be calm, Jeffrey. I thank you."

"And you refuse me! *You refuse me!*

For a child's dream about that pitiful fool, Edwin. You fling away a love so whole and true as mine is?"

"You will not buy love with insult! I would respect you, though I may not love you. Why did you come here? Why did you not leave the poor daughter of the miserable painter to——your words are very cruel——your love is very bitter—it is like hate!"

"And it *is* hate, sometimes, even for you! I do hate you sometimes, when I think how you have dragged me down—how my pride has been humbled and degraded by you! I did not think to choose a wife from Jowland Street—but let that go. I might have looked to have been loved where I loved! I have had to give up that. If I had hoped that the woman I loved, though she loved not me, loved no other. I have had to give that up, too. I love you, and you love another—or you fancy you do—for you cannot really, not as I love

you. This may well be like hate! Take care it is not more like it—take care I am not still more cruel. You *shall* love me, Sylvia—I say you shall—or—”

“Or what?”

“Don't force me to be a savage—a villain. But perhaps I hold hostages that only your love can ransom. In this hand, Paul Foster—in this, Edwin Gabriel Erle. As you are cruel, so I will be. I will open my hand, or I will tighten my clutch, as your conduct shall decide me. Your father is my debtor your cousin—well, perhaps, I have a hold upon him also. It may be dangerous to make me an enemy.”

“You threaten me?”

“As you say, I am cruel in my love.”

“For shame, Jeffrey! you don't know what you are saying. You think a woman can be made to love, as a prisoner was of old made to confess, by cruelty and torture. You despise me—insult those dear to me—threaten them, and call this *love*. You

deride my feelings as contemptible fancies. Let us say I know nothing of the subject; yet I may have an ideal, a nobler one than yours: it has nothing to do with selfish hopes, or rank, or state, or advancement. I can fancy a love that can give itself away, heart and soul, and seek for nothing in return; that getting nothing in return—dying unknown, unexpressed—yet has abated nothing—never dreamt of hatred, cruelty, or retaliation, or wrong-doing; but through its whole course has been ever kind, and good, and pure, and so going down into the grave to wake in another world true and constant still—if such things may be.”

She was very white, and her voice trembled with earnestness and feeling; the words were uttered in so complete a tone of belief and conviction, that Jeffrey could not help being moved by them. And then, how much grander was her ideal than his!

“Not a matter of merchandise,” she said, “of buying or selling, or even bar-

tering and exchanging—simply giving.”

“And you can love like this, Sylvia?” he asked, in a subdued manner.

“Perhaps I can,” she answered.

“How could you see him bowing before another, and yet not wish to strike her dead?”

“I could join his hand and hers, if his happiness demanded it.”

“And make no sign?—and not hate?—and not find your fingers clutching, as though they longed for a knife? *Après?*”

“I can see nothing further—I know no more. I once thought I could live it down, could ice over my heart, and forget all about my love.” She pointed to Paul’s picture of Sappho on an easel in the corner of the room. “Perhaps *she* was right after all, and there is nothing to do but die. Yet, she had been loved once. Life must have been worth something to her, if it had only been to look back upon the past, and live for it!”

"Sylvia, you are better than I am ; perhaps you love in a grander sort of way—in a way that may not be real, or true, or possible, in this world. Yet, I did you injustice when I said your feelings were childish—I have done you much injustice—I have been very rude and violent. I am ruled by fits, I think, sometimes. I have the cruelty of a savage in my heart—then I am tender again to folly." And he brushed away the tears from his eyes. "You will forgive me, Sylvia ; I think I was mad when I said some of the things I have said to-night. Though I know, when the demon is on me, it is part of my wretched nature to put in execution all I have threatened. More, if need were. I am mad sometimes, or nearly so. But then I have suffered very much. You know some of my suffering ; not all—not all ! I would I could go mad altogether ! If indeed madness could bring forgetfulness, and oblivion, and unconsciousness. I will say no more to-night, Sylvia ; if I speak on

this subject again I will seek to do so in a calmer—in a gentler spirit.”

He took her hand ; he held it pressed in his, as though he were about to say more ; he gazed at her very tenderly for some minutes. Abruptly he let go her hand.

“And you could die for Edwin — as Sappho for Phaon?”

He looked at the picture disdainfully. A sneer stole on to his face.

“And you would join the hands of Edwin and the actress at the Nonpareil?”

With no formal words of parting, without another look or syllable, he strode from the room, went slowly down stairs, and passed out into the street.

“Yes,” he murmured—“an island in the south—a sunny sky—to forget and be forgotten : these, and Sylvia’s love. Have I any further ambition now ? And a career !—a successful life !—fortune !—the applause of society ! What are these to me now ? Bah !

Nothing!" and he ground his heel on the pavement and went his way.

Sylvia smoothed her hair, and had just time to feel that her cheeks were burning very much as she entered the room in which she had left Paul asleep. She found him sitting up, bending over his book but not looking at it. His eyes were staring, in a fixed, vacant way. There was silence for some minutes. Sylvia resumed her seat, but she touched not her work, for her hands were trembling.

"You refused him?" Paul asked slowly. Sylvia started.

"You were awake—you heard?"

"Something—not all. And you refused him?" Sylvia made no reply.

"It would have been a good match. Jeffrey will be rich. He will be the head of the old firm of Fosket, Bishop & Erle some day. The old man cannot last much longer. Yes, it would have been a good match!" It was more as though he were

thinking aloud than holding a conversation.

"But if I do not love him?" said Sylvia gently.

"Yes, a good match. For I'm growing old—I feel it more every day. I'm not the man I was; and—my things don't sell—and the taste of the age has gone wrong and changed, and—there's very little money to be got now-a-days. Yes, I'm old; and when I go—when my life drops—which it will some day—"

"Polly, dearest, don't talk like that."

"There wont be much left. The large pictures—but I feel they wont fetch large prices! There'll be the Artists' Benevolent, but that can't do much! Yes, a good match."

"But if I do not love him?" Sylvia said again.

"And he holds my note of hand, and might come down upon me any day—sell me up—bag and baggage! And what will Edwin ever do? What will he ever be

worth? Nothing—nothing—nothing! Yes, it is a pity!”

“Then you think,” the colour rushing from her cheeks, “you think I should have accepted his offer?”

Paul got up and kissed her forehead.

“It was a pity to throw cold water on it altogether; but there may be time yet.”

“But if I do not love him?” she pleaded again. “You would not have a marriage without love, Polly, dearest. Answer me—not a marriage without love?”

He stared at her very earnestly.

“No—not that. A marriage without love? No, no, God forbid—anything but that!”

Then he took to rumpling his hair in an absent, abstracted way.

“Yet, it would have been a good match.” And then again, “Yes, a good match. What a pity you can’t love him, Syl!—a fine muscular figure—straight as an arrow; yes, and a handsome face too, and—and—he

holds my note of hand, and do what I will
I don't know how I could find the money if
he were to come down upon me for it."

Sylvia looked sorrowfully at her parent.

CHAPTER VII.

SYLVIA'S SORROW.

SYLVIA passed a very sad and restless night. She had hardly ever before felt so truly miserable. The evening of her visit to the Nonpareil—of her first sight of Miss Aurelia Vane—of her first conviction that a possibility existed of Edwin's being possessed by a real love for the actress—not a conventional admiration merely, but a real love—*that* had been bad enough in all conscience, but it was nothing to this. That had been more of an impulsive, superficial burst of anger; this was a settled, deep-planted sorrow. To the old bad distress were

now superadded new and worse distresses. Fresh complications had come in aggravation of the original disease—like had not cured like, upon the homœopathic principle; the present suffering had not ousted the past; so the patient was in a worse state than ever—very low, and crushed, and suffering indeed.

Sylvia's world had been a small one, a very small one if you will—more of a little garden than a world. Still in her way she had tilled and cultured it, and toiled in it, and spent much time and care, thought, and energy upon it. Paul, of course, was as the centre old trunk of a tree, round which all the pretty flowers were taught and trained to twine, and to bend before the majestic stem, and pay suit and homage. It had been the task of her life to make his pathway as smooth and peaceable, his surroundings as graceful and pleasant as her small, dexterous hands and loving heart and busy brain could accomplish. It has before

been suggested how successfully the little daughter had laboured to supply the void left in Paul Foster's life and heart, by the death of Désirée Barielle; and this had been effected all naturally, all as of course. There had been no chalking out of a line of conduct, and then a painful, long striving task to adhere to the defined duty, with a religious scrupulosity that had in it something rigid and repelling. By a sort of loving instinct Sylvia had at once stepped into the road on which it was at once her duty and her joy to travel. Loving her father with all her soul, it was inevitable that she should watch, and serve, and tend him—anticipate his wishes—foresee his requirements—sympathise with his efforts, and his pictorial enterprises, even though they were not always intelligible to her—and guide, and protect, and rule him for his good. It has been hinted that Mr. Foster was a gentleman requiring some rule and governance—a very noble steed, but still one that

needed the curb now and then, and generally careful management—or there would be prancing on the pavement, kicking in of plate glass, confusion, and damage, and coming to grief.

The entry of Edwin into the garden of Sylvia's life had been without disturbance or intrusion. She set up for him at once a separate altar—for him she cultured fresh flowers, and made more garlands, and increased her graceful labours. No one suffered—there was no neglect—no pillaging of one shrine to enrich the other; homage to Paul, care and love for Paul, abated no whit—only the garden was the richer and the brighter, and the devotee more busy, and happy, and beautiful; for nothing makes a woman so beautiful as love. It is, the best cosmetic, the most certain elixir of loveliness; and kalydor will do very little good to your face, my dear young lady, unless you have love in your heart. And Sylvia grew out of childhood.

You will find some faint descriptions of her charms at earlier pages of this history. I cannot re-enumerate them; for, after all, my list does her no justice, satisfies me not, and gives so poor a notion to the reader of what my Sylvia Foster was really like.

Was it wonderful that she should love her cousin, Edwin Gabriel Erle? Was it strange that she should rear up for him a temple to the full as fine and grand as the temple of her love for Paul? Was it that he was the only male being that had entered that aforesaid garden of her life? I know that ingenious writers have maintained, relying on the asserted necessity existing in a woman's heart for love, that, had time been given her, and Prince Ferdinand not been wrecked upon the shore of the enchanted island, Miranda would have given her hand to the wretched Caliban, and reciprocated his passion, and hung upon his words, and deemed him a marvel of beauty and mental perfectness and wis-

dom. But then came the prince, and the poor monster was cut out, and lost his chance, and left for life to herd with such sots as Stephano, such fools as Trinculo.

And was Sylvia in any such plight as this? I don't say that she was. Edwin was not the only male she had ever seen, even if she had had the fortune to meet a Caliban or two. Paul Foster had not the means to entertain much company, at any rate not the company out of which Prince Ferdinands are collected—he had not the means to take his daughter to the splendid balls given at the palace of the Duke Alonzo, even supposing that he possessed the entrée to that nobleman's festivities, which, by the way, he didn't. Poverty had ever been plucking at his skirts, and holding him back, and eating into his respectability like a moth into a coat. As a student at the Academy—hard-working and needy enough—he fell into the habits of slovenliness, and recklessness, and self-disrespect, which ad-

hered to him all his life. He could never emancipate himself from his early slipshod fashions—he was just the same in his age, despairing of selling his great works, as he had been in his youth—full of hope and, as he thought, promise, making his first drawing from the life. The old original grub state had never been, could never be, thoroughly shaken off—it still sullied, and clogged, and impeded him: as he began so he was to end, a slatternly student of the Fine Arts, a lodger in Jowland Street, out of the pale of society, and not invited to her receptions and banquets—like a pendulum, swinging between the pawnbroker's on one side and the public house on the other; squabbling with the Academy, abusing the contemporaries who had distanced him, painting much and selling little, unpliant, impracticable, bigoted, obstinate, a man cut out by Nature for failure and misfortune. Perhaps all this was not wholly his own fault—perhaps he came at rather a transition period

in art—perhaps he had been genuinely unfortunate—perhaps there were other circumstances not now to be related that yet should be taken into the account in summing up Paul Foster and striking a balance about him. However, he was now past all cure, more than fifty years of age, and success as far off as ever, his hair gray and his pockets empty still, age's furrows on his forehead, and still a milk-score owing, and his butcher and baker unpaid, and his liabilities much in excess of his assets.

But, in spite of his quarrels, and strong language, and ill success, Paul preserved his temper. It says something for the good nature of the man that he had been able to accept "fortune's buffets and rewards," if not "with equal thanks," still with considerable equanimity, and not over-much repining. If he now and then rebelled at the triumphs of Fritter, A.R.A., and envied his success, while he despised his means of attaining it, and contemned in unmeasured

terms the pur-blindness of the public which could see merit in Fritter's defects and shortcomings in Foster's talent, still he had been on the whole not unhappy. He loved the work which brought him such slender returns—he had loved his dead Désirée, he loved dearly his living Sylvia; and his draggle-tail habits suited him; he liked his daubed, soiled, easy, torn painting-clothes—he liked a scrambling dinner in the studio, when he walked about eating, gnawing a mutton-chop bone while he surveyed his achievements—he liked the unceremonious hot tumbler and the strongly-flavoured tobacco, his at any hour if he so willed, and the rum-tum-tiddy burthen, as he slopped and slapped about with his big hog's-bristle brushes; he liked his free-and-easy, dowdy, struggling, dunned existence. If he had fits of despondency they were not of long duration; if he now and then pondered how Sylvia would thrive when he was taken away, and nothing left to her but his

debts, and old clothes, and shabby furniture, and big pictures, still he could turn from these to the G in the bottle, to Lempriere's classical dictionary, to denunciations of Fritter, to his evening stroll over his cheap cigar in the pleasant avenues of the adjoining Regent's Park. He was not systematically an unhappy man, or, as we have seen, a disagreeable or unattractive one; so he had friends, men of his own stamp for the most part—most of them painters, most of them unsuccessful, who were welcome to his studio, and to such entertainment as he could give them there—to any tobacco there might be in the pouch, to any alcohol there might remain in the bottle.

And he had had pupils too. Some of the elder academicians, who remembered Paul as a successful student, had often done him kindnesses in that way—sending him scholars to be trained for the more advanced education of the Academy schools. For

they knew that Paul was what they called well-grounded in art, according to Academy traditions, and that he would keep his pupils as he had been himself kept—though with what result?—grinding hard for so long at the skeleton—so long at the antique, so long at outline, so long at stippling—before induction to the glories of life-drawing. So they did their old scholar this kindness, which, as he never fully understood, it did not hinder his growling lustily at his wrongs, as he termed them, and the injustice done him, as he considered, by the rejection of his colossal works, or their bad hanging. It is wonderful how artists cling to the notion that their whole professional expectations rest upon the way in which their pictures are treated by the hanging committee! And among the young gentlemen who had worked under Paul's tutelage, might not Sylvia have found someone to love—someone quite equal to play the part of Prince Ferdinand, failing the arrival of

that great potentate in person? They all admired her intensely—one or two, I know, were passionately in love; little Mackison, I remember in particular, who, at one time was going to stab himself with his palette knife, only he thought better of it, and didn't; and instead, married the colourman's widow, and so settled his long accounts for paints and canvases, and brushes, and vehicles. They all doated upon her ample red gold locks, and raved about her exquisite colour, and the wondrous beauty of her hazel eyes—quite, as they said, beyond all rendering in paint, even with burnt sienna, and flecks of flake white. And they were all very kind and good-natured in their admiration, and full of respect and tenderness for the *padrone's* daughter, and as courtly as their simple, honest, student manners would permit; and filled scrap-books for her with their sketches and caricatures of each other, and drawings of herself from memory, and other such pleasant

matters. They would now and then, it is true, beg for a lock of her golden hair in return, though their wishes in that respect were never gratified; and Sylvia only laughed at and teased them for their pains, after the fashion of naughty little loved young ladies. I never could quite make out whether they wanted the lock for love, or for art purposes. For, after all, your painter is the only one who honestly admires red gold hair, and experiments upon his palette, in regard to it, and attempts to reproduce it, and loves it thoroughly, as an article in the creed of his art. And whereas these good student fellows were always praising this appendage of Sylvia's, I really believe that half of their love for her was bound up in her tresses, and they longed for possession of her in order that they might always have the locks at hand, to paint when they choose—a property of the painting-room. For there were others ever lamenting this, as they were pleased to consider it, blemish in the

beauty of Sylvia. Miss Mountalbert, professor of the piano, on the ground-floor in Jowland Street—her own hair being of a cold, brilliant coal black, was often heard to say: "Dear, what a pity it is Miss Foster has that coloured 'air—why, she'd be almost pretty if it wasn't for her 'air, such a dreadful 'ue, ain't it. But we can't be choosers, that's one thing!" and she smoothed her own black madonnas over her shining forehead. How her forehead did shine, you'd have thought she used varnish to it! "You must always count, child," she would say to her pupil, "one and two—and one and two—that cross is for your thumb—rum, tum, tiddy—dum, tum, tiddy—all wrong, begin again, pay more attention."

So you see it was not absolutely for Miranda's reason that Sylvia found her Ferdinand in her cousin Edwin. He was frank and affectionate. She was made acquainted with his plans, and hopes, and disappointments, long before others had

dreamed of them ; he was perfectly true to her—admired her, as she knew, even to her hair, quite as much as the gentleman in the studio—loved quite as much as they did to make drawings of her in his sketch-book, with her head in all sorts of positions and lights. Yet she soon began to feel, as she crept from the child Syl to the woman Sylvia, that there was a something in her heart which lived not in his. There was a deep, strong love throbbing and heaving in her gentle bosom, to which his calm, unmoved manner betrayed that he could make no response. The gentlemen in the studio affected sentiment in regard to her, and addressed verses to her, such as they were, and longed to keep her portraits in lockets on their hearts, never to be disturbed from that sacred resting-place, no matter how inconvenient it might be ; and were always drawing sketches of couples swearing constancy, in attitudes of devotion before moons (in white chalk), with some attempted resemblances

and references to portraiture in the representation of the lovers. Edwin had made no such expression of himself. Kind, pure, and true, further than this he stirred not. It was enough to make her love him ; but it was not enough to satisfy her love. Before she was quite conscious of it herself, she had given him her heart, past all taking back again ; and she was happy, though the happiness would bear an addition being made to it ; and in the half-formed, vague dreams of her heart, it seemed to her that she would be content if things could only go on just as they were, she would ask no more ; to love Edwin, and see him often, to be with him, to talk to him, to hear him talk, to sympathise with him, to share his plans—could she do this she would press down all further yearnings—she could feed and quiet the longings and aching of her heart with these, she thought, and be still happy—very happy. But then came the Miss Vane evening, and much pain ; and

here was Jeffrey's declaration, and Paul Foster's opinion about it, and great sorrow and suffering altogether.

A dreadful earthquake had occurred in Sylvia's garden, and there came a chasm opening a wide mouth between the two altars; the flowers were in peril—the garlands were being strained, and nearly snapping in their tension—a sense of desolation was clouding over the whole landscape. And this was Jeffrey's doing! No wonder she had cried in her anger, repeating his rude words: Why had he come with his love, to make her wretched—the poor daughter of the miserable painter? And yet it was his love that had brought him. Surely, there was reason, and apology, and some consolation in that. Yes, he loved her—in a strange, proud, vehement, unattractive way, very likely, but still it was love; and can a woman be very angry for very long with a man who loves her passionately? She had not sought his love;

and never, by one word or look, given him encouragement or hope. Yet he had come and laid bare his heart—he had never done so before to living creature—and flung its treasured secrets at her feet, avowed that his passion was consuming him, and begged her hand; and Polly was on his side, and talked of a good match, and his own poverty, and of coming misfortune; and there had been threats too, and ruin—was it not so?—to Paul and injury to Edwin! Could such things be? And should she be really compelled to marry Jeffrey? The thought made her quite hate him! No! She could never love him! She could not—she would not!—never, never, never! And Edwin—where was he?—where had he flown?—why had he not come to her?—why had he not unfolded to her his plans? Oh, it was plain to see he did not love her—he never gave her a thought! She was nothing to him—had been nothing—could be nothing! Oh,

if he did but know how in her heart she loved him !

So on—over and over again—the same thoughts recurring and recurring, chasing each other round a bewildering wheel, maddening the brain, sickening the heart ! Poor Sylvia ! She surveyed the seeming ruin of her life's happiness, and the tears started from her eyes, and it seemed to her that she was the most wretched of living creatures ; that none had suffered before, none could suffer again, as she did then. How many fellow-sufferers, tossing on their couches, were making a like cry ? —for there is ever pain in the world, and each thinks his sorrows top his neighbour's by many and many a pang.

She did not love Jeffrey, she never had loved Jeffrey, she never could love Jeffrey ! —so she cried petulantly. There was something harsh, and cruel, and repellent about his passion. It was not tender—could it be true ? In fact, Jeffrey had

made love in a very poor, ill-conditioned sort of way: he had been full of himself and his sacrifices, of his ambition, and his humiliation; he talked of love in a commercial spirit, as though he had looked to make a good thing out of the transaction; his thoughts had been all of himself, little of her. He had made a very grievous error. He might attribute all to his want of learning, to his ignorance of the right manner of doing things, to his never having been in the same plight before, and other such twopenny pleas. It is all a very simple matter. Love is like a shipwreck. If you want to reach the shore, strip, my boy, sharp as you can, plunge headlong into the tossing waters, and, peradventure, breathless and bruised, and blinded by the water, and your hair a wet plaster on your forehead, you may touch the place of safety. Ponder over your pride, and your best clothes, and the money in your pockets, and the dead loss of the business, and you

go down in the wreck for certain. Winning, the prize may not be worth much, or she may spurn you with her foot as you lie panting on the shingle: winning, you have but won a woman after all, a single specimen of a kind of creature of which there are a good many millions about in the world; but, if you would strive, go the right way to work, straight overboard—and may God speed you, and may she be worthy of you when you win her.

Jeffrey was of that kind of persons we may call unapproachable. He was like those articles in a museum from which you are strictly railed off, and particularly requested not on any account to touch. You could never get near to Jeffrey. You could never put your hand upon his left side and feel his heart beat. It might or might not: there might be a great surging passion turbulent within, or a cold vacuum like an ice-cellar. You must take for granted, or guess, for you

could never know. Always watchful, careful, calm, respectable, he never untied himself—he never took off his sober garb to caper about in motley—never took anyone close to him, opened a door and bid him watch the movements of the mechanism to which was traceable his every action and conduct; he never melted over wine even—never babbled, or shewed his hand, or talked of his failings, or tattled self-revealing historiettes, as some will, betraying themselves so woefully, as though claret were Lethe. He was not the man to succeed in love, it seems to me; he was too much in rule for that irregular pursuit. And so his fervent petitions won no successful reply from Sylvia, and after-reflection bettered not his case in her thinking. He had never been near her—he was as far off from her as ever—he was coated in ice, and if she placed her hand upon him she shivered with cold, did not tremble with love.

Sylvia, as we have told, was deeply

pained and moved by what had passed ; but it must not be supposed that to any outward appearance any alteration had taken place in her views of life. There is a moment of sorrow, of course, when rising from a most bitter trial we wonder how, with this cruel weight of woe upon our hearts, the world can go on the same—how clocks can strike, cocks crow, the policeman pass on his beat, the butcher call for orders, just as though nothing out of the way had happened. But this sensation endures not long. We begin to feel at last that such things must be ; and though we mourn in crape, our neighbours can yet rejoice in colours. So the poor widow woman, the loved partner of her life rudely snatched from her, begins at last to pluck up a little spirit, and to give orders for dinner—yes, and the servants' mourning—coburg for the cook, and merino for the nurse ; and is this the sort of cap you make now, with these long streamers ? And while all this sorrow

is in your house and hearts, Tibbs, that Lothario shopboy, is walking by, winking at your servants as he walks, dreaming nothing of the coffin on the second floor: Tibbs, Lothario Tibbs, strolling along in a porkpie hat, with his penny cane, and his three-halfpenny cigar.

Sylvia came down to breakfast, therefore, on the morrow of this sad night, looking much as usual, and going on with the daily routine with accustomed alacrity and cheerfulness—or very nearly so. She supplied the painter with his tea; he liked size, did Paul, and quantity, and particularly despised half measures and small cups; (I think he always took his tea from a vessel that was purposed by its manufacturer to be a slop-basin,) and furnished him with his watercresses (which vegetable Paul regarded as an indispensable adjunct to breakfast) and his many slices of crackling dry toast—he took about half-a-quire of these slices on an average. Paul had got the better, in a great

measure, of the melancholy and foreboding that had affected him on the previous evening.

"There's nothing like a good breakfast," he said, devouring toast noisily, "to begin the day well upon; nothing like a good foundation. These water-cresses are splendid for the time of year. Syl, my dear, you're eating nothing. I'll take just a little more tea, if the pot will stand it. I think I shall finish that sketch of 'Endymion,' and send it down to Robinson's, and let it go for what it will fetch. I've got a frame that will fit it. I could give a touch or two to the head from you, Syl."

"Are you very poor now, Polly, dear?"

"Well," Paul answers, rubbing his head; "to tell you the truth, I am—I may say, deuced—and that's the fact. And that beastly bootmaker, Simmons, has had the insolence—the absolute indecency, to write again for his money. It is perfectly disgust-

ing, and the boots have not worn well by any means."

"Is he going to call?"

"Oh, of course he's going to call—*that* I don't so much mind, but he says something about the County Court. I suppose I am to understand it as a threat. I was in such a rage, I threw his letter in the fire. I'm sorry it's burnt now, because I should like to know exactly what he *did* say. Yes, I'll send the 'Endymion' to Robinson's. What it is to be a painter! An unfortunate one! A maltreated, insulted, wronged painter!"

"I have been thinking, Polly—" and then she paused.

"Thinking what, my dear?"

"That, as we're so poor—as you just now said—and as things are just now so bad with us, and the pictures don't sell, and people—like Simmons—press us a good deal for money—I was thinking that if—"

"If what, Syl?"

"If I could help you in some way. If I

could do something that would bring us in some money—of course, I know I'm quite useless at present—and dependent—and only a weight—and a drag, and an incumbrance upon you—

“My dearest Syl!”

“Yes, but I know I am. If I could teach—give lessons, you understand—help you really, Polly—earn some money that would be of use to us both—be a governess, in fact—”

“And leave me, Syl,” said Paul, piteously. “You don't mean that! What, go away, and leave me to shift for myself, and let everything get wrong—as would be sure to happen. Not that, Syl—don't leave me!”

“No, Polly. No, I couldn't do that!” and the tears came into her eyes, and she hid her face in his breast, with her arms tight round his neck; “but I don't like to feel that I am useless—absolutely useless.”

“But you are not useless, Syl.”

“But you said last night—oh! it

made me so sad, Polly—when Jeffrey came—”

“Ah! I remember. Yes—Jeffrey came—and—yes—yes.”

“But you didn’t mean it, Polly, dearest—say you didn’t. You don’t really wish me—”

“To accept Jeffrey? It would be a great match, Syl. It would be the making of us all.”

“No, Polly, you wouldn’t have thought so once. Let us go on as we are—you and me—and never, never part!—let us go on painting, and poor as we are.”

“We’re likely to,” murmurs Paul.

“Yet happy, Polly—for we have been happy. What signifies poverty?”

“Simmonses and County Courts, I fear, my dear. Kiss me—we’ll say no more about it—not now. Come and finish the ‘Endymion’ for Robinson. No more about the governess business, Syl. Where did I put that sketch? We might have bubble and

squeak for dinner, to-day—I rather like bubble and squeak—from that cold beef we had yesterday. Here's 'Endymion!' Do you think he's likely to sell?"

CHAPTER VIII.

NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOURS.

THE backs of the houses in Araminta Row, Pimlico, looked on to the backs of the houses in Arethusa Place. A double line of small parallelogram gardens divided the Row and the Place. It is to be hoped that the principle which rules cabinet-councils, and which requires that the proceedings of such conclaves shall be presumed to be under the inviolable seal of secrecy, obtained rather than not in Araminta Row and Arethusa Place. A similar convention was certainly necessary, otherwise nearly the whole conduct and mode of life of the tenants

of those buildings were liable to become the property of the public ; because it was inevitable that neighbours so closely packed should possess extreme information as to the doings of each other. When No. 6 worked in his garden he was patent to the observation, and formed an interesting figure in the landscape, to be enjoyed from the windows of all his co-tenants. When the two young ladies at No. 4, Arethusa Place, practised on the *piccolo-piano*, in their back drawing-room—and the performance came off every day precisely at twelve o'clock—then the duet from “Norma,” arranged by Thalberg, was brought home thoroughly to all the adjoining houses, and became either the solace or the annoyance of the inhabitants. On washing days, No. 13 unscrupulously displayed the whole wardrobe of its household, hung on ropes in the garden for drying purposes ; there was no concealment, and the neighbourhood were at liberty to estimate the value of the family

linen, and its cut, and pattern, and state of repair—from the pink muslin dressing-gown of Mrs. No. 13, to the scarlet and white bags, in which were to be clothed the tiny feet of baby No. 13, last arrived. And when Mr. Septimus Rook, in his narrow-rimmed boating hat, and his short plaid shooting-coat, with the very large buttons, smoked his cutty pipe in the small enclosure at the back of the house in which he lodged, he also was a well-recognized object, and familiar—unconsciously, so far as he was concerned—to the eyes of a good many of the surrounding dwellers, including Miss Aurelia Vane.

It must not be held to the discredit of our young friend's powers of observation, that although he had constantly seen a female form perambulating the adjoining garden, he had altogether failed to identify that form with the distinguished actress of the T. R. Nonpareil. Miss Vane had not kindled the fires of his admiration to any

great extent. She had not made so forcible or successful an appeal to his sentiments as she had to those of his fellow-articled clerk. He had never looked upon her, so to speak, with Edwin's eyes. The poetry of her motions, the music of her voice, the grace of her gestures, had not greatly moved him. When he first saw Miss Vane at the *Nonpareil*, in her celebrated role of *Cracked Tom*, it had then seemed to him that her face was not unfamiliar ; and when he had been able to obtain a glimpse of the features of the young lady next door, it had also seemed to him that they were not unknown to him ; but he never troubled himself any further about the business, caring little enough, be it said, in regard to it. He did not sit down to wonder over it, and ponder it, and puzzle it out. Edwin would have detected the identity in a moment ; but then he possessed an artist's eye ; but then he was accustomed to follow the curving of lines, and to study the shaping of features ;

and, above all, as poor Sylvia had persuaded herself, to her great cost—he loved, did he not? Miss Aurelia Vane.

Mr. Rook constantly strolled up and down his small domain, smoking a morning pipe, which, if he did not absolutely enjoy, he held to be still a proper thing to do. He was accustomed to rise early, like most people from the country—at any rate, early for the late-houred habits of London. Enjoying mentally his adventure in the omnibus, and the subsequent transactions at the “Sun in the Sands,” he smoked his pipe on the morrow of those events, as he walked about in the garden—if it could be called a garden—and indeed, honestly, it hardly could be; there were no flowers, no plants, shrubs, trees, vegetable life of any kind; there was a centre walk of dirty, gritty gravel, and what were termed beds on each side of a dirtier, grittier kind of earth, which went under the courtesy title of mould. The whole may be said to have been neatly half-

bound in brick ; for a dwarf wall formed the enclosing, not quite breast high, over which you could, if you so pleased, shake hands with your neighbour, without the slightest difficulty. Not that the inhabitants of those houses were in the habit of interchanging such courtesies. It was quite *de rigueur* not to know, not to care for, not to see, not to have any the slightest connexion with the man who resided next door to you. Even though he stood quite close to you, was within a yard of you, and you could see the stitches of his shirt collar, while he blockaded your view, it was your duty to look steadily at him, through him, and out beyond at the prospect; to ignore him utterly, not to think of seeing him, much less of speaking to him or knowing him, though he might be thoroughly acquainted, as he probably would be, with all about you—your name, your age, where you were christened, the amount of your income, what you had for dinner yesterday, what you were going

to have for dinner to-day and to-morrow. But Mr. Rook, strolling in his garden and thinking over the romantic episodes of the previous evening, could hardly refrain from lifting his eyes to the windows of the adjoining houses; and as in the course of one of these glances he met the eyes of a lady at the second-floor window, standing before a looking-glass, and with a large brush smoothing a flood of dark hair streaming in an abandoned sort of way on either side of, and very nearly over, her face—and as the eyes evidently recognized him, and the lips in the neighbourhood of the eyes formed themselves into a smile, what could he do but smile too, and raise his narrow-rimmed hat in homage, while the lady stayed her brushing, and held low her brush to bow again with a better grace? Thus were all the conventions and traditions of Araminta Row, as to the due conduct of next-door neighbours in their relations to each other, altogether set at naught and defied by the po-

liteness of Mr. Septimus Rook and the courtesy of Miss Aurelia Vane, prompted by their encounter in the Royal Green omnibus.

A little old man with close clipped hair and a mottled face, a dirty shirt and an unsteady gait, came down out of the back door of Miss Vane's house, and entered the garden. Mr. Rook immediately recognized his acquaintance of the previous night. He was engaged on the blacking of a boot, in rather a mindless and unstable way.

"Hullo! Boss," Mr. Septimus exclaimed. The old man looked towards him moodily, stupidly.

"It's you, is it?" he said, evidently not knowing him.

"Yes, how did you get to bed?" The old man appeared to have a vague recollection visit him.

"You helped me, didn't you? Ah! I remember now—hush!" and Mr. Boss motioned silence and caution by pressing his

blackening brush on his lip, and then pointing upward to Miss Vane's window. "I don't want *her* to hear. I was very bad, wasn't I?"

"Well, you were rather."

"So I thought—did you have much trouble with the lock?—did you open the door, or did I?—and I say, do you know where my hat's got to?—I can't find it anywhere. I'm afraid it's been shut out all night, and been eaten by the dog at 18. An awful animal to eat he is. Hush! is her window open? No?—ah! then it's all right. I was very bad, was I? Dear me, to think of that, and all I had was a glass of ale at three o'clock—not a drop else, I give you my honour. Did I talk Shakespere? I did? Much? Ah! then," with gloomy satisfaction, "I was really bad if I did that."

"How are you now?"

"Horrid! Do I look bad?"

"Well, you do a little."

"Ah! I was afraid I did. To think a

glass of ale should affect a fellow so, ain't it shocking?—shocking, I call it. See what it is to have a poor constitution! My head's awful! I say, is that boot clean?—is it now? Really, I can't see a bit; and she'll be in such a way—I seem to get all the blacking on my hands! You think it will do, then?"

"Is it her boot?"

"Of course it is!—whose else do you think it is?—mine? What! a little boot like this? Well, you are a funny one. No, I *have* a small foot, I know, and a good shaped one, but not so small as this comes to. No, you can't judge of it now, because I've got carpet slippers on. You see, my corns are so painful. It's *her* boot; and she's mighty particular about her Balmorals, I can tell you—ah! and proud of her feet, too, for that matter. Dear, how bad I am!—and it's Sunday too, and one can't get anything until one o'clock! I suppose now," and Mr. Boss's bloodshot eyes gazed with a steady anxiety into the face of Septimus, "I sup-

pose, now, you haven't anything in your place—medicinal like—good for the spasms, or for—for screwing up the nerves; I don't mean medicine, you know, precisely;" and then he added, with a painful eagerness, "if it was only gin, it would be something!"

Before Septimus could reply, there came the sound as of a rustling silk dress, and Miss Vane entered the garden. She turned with a severe frown upon the old man.

"What are you doing here, sir? Go in directly! How dare you!—go in, do!—this minute. Ugh!"

She spoke to him scoldingly, as though he had been an ill-behaved dog or cat, and, like either of those quadrupeds, Mr. Boss cowered and slunk into the house, not glancing again towards Septimus, and taking with him the Balmoral boot and the blacking-brush.

Then said Miss Vane to Septimus, with a smile of extreme winningness and affability,

and a graceful movement of her hands,
"Good morning Mr. Rook. I hope you are quite well."

And Septimus again lifted his narrow-rimmed hat in compliment to Miss Vane.

We all know all about the conventional idea of the actress off the stage—that the houri of the footlights and the mimic scene is anything but a houri in the glare of the sun and on the ordinary paths of life. The theory was probably born of days when there were no opera-glasses, and audiences were prone to wrap themselves in dreamy delusions as to the intense loveliness of the actress; it is not at the best a doctrine to be maintained without considerable exceptance. For, in fact, the dazzle of gas, and the flare of crude white and red, are by no means necessarily improving to female beauty. A woman who is unfortunately and unmistakeably plain may derive a sort of raw brilliance from these means, which may possibly enhance charms it would take

a good deal to injure. But the really pretty actress is placed in a decidedly worse position. The stage method of lighting from the level of the feet of the performer is singularly trying—shadows are thrown upon the eyes and the forehead, while the chin is brought into an absurd illumination; harshness and rigidity are given to the outlines of the features by the strong light, and a hardness and density are imparted to the complexion by the inevitable rouge and pearl-powder. The result may be one of vast attractiveness to the half-price young gentlemen hanging on at the back of the pit, but, viewed from the stalls, it is hardly so engaging. Critics object occasionally to pictures, on the ground that you can see the "brush-marks" too plainly; and with some of the animated paintings on the boards, the complaint also applies that the mechanism from a near view is obtrusively evident.

Miss Vane, to my thinking, looked better

in her quiet costume of everyday life, than even in the becoming apparel of the "idiot boy." True, the long locks were tightly banded up, and the supple lithe limbs were shrouded in ample sleeves and skirts, and the colour was gone from her face, and she wore a slightly fatigued expression. But she was really a very pretty woman; and her dark grey eyes, made still darker by the deep shadow of her long black eyelashes, wore a certain air of languor, that was decidedly prepossessing; and if exception might be taken to the proportions of her mouth, the pearliness of her very regular teeth was beyond all praise. Even Mr. Rook, who was in a position to be critical, and whose judgment was inclined to bias, from his expressed preference for another and a different order of beauty, mentally admitted that Miss Vane looked very well indeed, while he murmured inwardly, in his own phrase, that she was a "screamer," whatever that might be, though

it is presumable that it was an epithet of compliment. She was very pale, it must be confessed, and perhaps the pale brunette is not a pleasing kind of complexion. I know that a painter will tell you that he has to use all sorts of strange hues—dun browns, and dark reds, and ugly greens—in his rendering of the tones and shadows of this complexion; and, therefore, according to all rule, it ought not to be so winning as the blonde, where his palette is covered with ultramarines, and delicate pinks, and exquisite pearly greys. Still, notwithstanding these drawbacks and difficulties, Miss Vane, in her morning silk, pale, quiet, smaller and more delicate-looking than she seemed at the Nonpareil, presented a very engaging appearance.

“I am afraid you had a great deal of trouble with Boss last night?”

Her voice was a little loud. Its constant employment on the stage necessitated this.

“She does not call him papa, or father,

or even *Mr. Boss*," thought Septimus. "I wonder whether Chinnery's story is correct?" This to himself. Then to her, "He wasn't quite well, I think. I hope he did not disturb you or alarm you, Miss Vane?"

"Oh, dear no! I'm quite used to it, thank you."

"Is he often taken like that?"

"Yes, too often."

"He said it was rheumatism."

There was an incipient grin on the face of Mr. Rook.

"It's not that—it's drink."

And Miss Vane gave a graceful smile.

It must be conceded of Miss Vane that while upon the boards she was perfectly easy and natural, and in these avowedly consisted the great charms of her acting; off the stage there appeared about her an inclination to be theatrical and artificial. Her smile had about it something studied and mannered, and she bowed

her head and quivered her eyelids as she smiled, which, imparting vividness, took away from the genuineness of the proceeding. There was, too, an inclination to be graceful, according to rule, remarkable in her gestures—a waving motion of the arms and a certain twirling outward of the hand from the wrist, being an idea of grace peculiar to the stage, and to the studios of certain artists of convention. Altogether, much as I admire Aurelia Vane, I am constrained to admit that the stage idea never completely quitted her. Once entertaining the notion that, even away from the Nonpareil, she was still playing a part, and you could not readily divest yourself of it—were always finding new evidences in its support and encouragement. Her smile was a smile to the pit, her *espièglerie* was addressed to the side-boxes, her waving hands and quivering eyelids were compliments to those kid gloves in the stalls from which only the orchestral

gulf divided her. She was terribly conscious, in fact. You lost this on the stage: she was too busy with her author, or felt her part too much, or could afford to let herself go, as it were; but now, not Miss Aurelia in the part of *Cracked Tom*, but Miss Aurelia Vane in the character of Miss Aurelia Vane, she was very full of herself indeed. And, is not this action pretty?—is not this smile coquettish?—is not this pose alluring?—(in fact, she had seen them all before, and studied well their effect in the looking-glass)—seemed to be the inquiries she was ever addressing to the spectator. Don't fancy this was done unskilfully, or in a raw, transparent, glaring sort of way. You and I, O reader, are permitted to look deeper into milestones, to peer further into mysteries, to watch heroines at their toilettes, and heroes pulling on their boots. We know all about Miss Vane—more, much more, than is permitted to others. Mr. Rook perceived little of all this we have

been remarking and commenting on. A certain something he did notice in Miss Vane's manner, that did seem peculiar even to him; but what that something was he neither knew nor troubled himself to ascertain.

So, as Miss Vane and Mr. Rook interchanged conversation and civilities over the dwarf wall, a second lady made her way into the garden. Miss Vane graciously bent to her.

"Good morning, Adelaide," she said. "Let me introduce you. My friend, my kind friend, next door, Mr. Rook—you have heard me speak of him. Miss Cobb—Miss Adelaide Cobb."

Mr. Rook again lifted the narrow-rimmed boating hat. As he surveyed the new comer he could not refrain from a mental ejaculation—I believe that to be the strictly correct term—of "Oh, my!"

Miss Cobb, Miss Adelaide Cobb, curtsayed

profoundly, smiled engagingly—the ceremony of introduction was completed.

“A nice morning,” said Mr. Rook, with an obsequious affability.

“De-licious!” answered Miss Cobb, with an acquiescence that was almost ecstatic.

(“A gusher!” murmured Mr. Rook; “I knew she was!”)

A lady in a full muslin dress, white ground with chocolate and orange flowers on it—not a pretty dress; a lady not old, not young, not short, not tall, not thin, not stout—but this is all dreadfully negative; I admit I am shrinking from accuracy. I should like to say that Miss Cobb was plain. If I dared I would say that she was ugly—downright ugly! Why should I not? Extremes meet; the attractiveness of extreme beauty may be shared by extreme ugliness—nay, was shared in the case of Miss Cobb. Honestly, I don't think any one could have been uglier. And yet, strange to say, there was something amount-

ing almost to fascination about the appearance of Miss Cobb. I am not going into detail—there is no pleasure in the analysis of the ill-shapen. I am not going to catalogue the features of my plain Adelaide. I shall say simply, that her little, sharp, black, beady eyes shot about with an extraordinary, if not an alarming restlessness. Her nose, her mouth, her chin, I prefer to leave intact. Her thin, sallow hair was scrupulously brushed off her broad fat face. Her figure, allowing for a slight squareness of shoulders, was rather good. And when you once got your eyes well on to Miss Cobb, you had great difficulty in taking them off again.

And who was Miss Cobb? Miss Vane's friend—foil some said, companion, confidante, dresser, *femme de chambre*, milliner, manager, cook. She was something of all these, I fancy.

There is a large class of women whose object in life seems to be to hang on to other

women. Not as menials quite—not as equals exactly. But to tend, serve, assist, be useful to, and be used by. And for no wages? No. A cheap brooch now and then, a cast-off silk dress, an occasional kiss. Small returns for great serving, and much fidelity. I am afraid these vassal women are generally plain-looking. Perhaps they like to warm themselves in the rays of another's beauty, to catch some beams from her abundant loveliness. They will do anything for their friend—toil, slave for her, sit up all night with her when she is sick, read her to sleep, strip themselves to keep her warm, fetch, carry—anything. A most self-sacrificing life. I hope it is a pleasant one. I hope it has its reward; for certain is it, good, ugly, faithful, confidantes, and hangers-on, your conduct merits recompense. Your fidelity should have appreciation.

And the antecedents of the hanger-on women, who knows anything of these? I

presume them to be always misfortune and ill success. Miss Cobb had been in the *corps de ballet*; she had no ear, she had no grace; she had been on the provincial stage; her voice was harsh, her memory not good; she was "a bad study," in theatrical phrase. I know no more of her. What she was to Miss Vane, I have hinted. She assisted her in many ways. She would wait for her at the theatre, (she was always known as "Ugly" by the scene-shifters, and supers), or she would sit up for her in Araminta Row, and prepare for her the most delicate little hot suppers imaginable. She would dress her, she would make her dresses, she would alter them and remake them, she would keep her accounts, she would keep her house tidy, and the one sluttish servant in order. She had influence over Mr. Boss. She would assist Miss Vane to learn her parts, she would hear her recite, and would criticise and suggest alterations. She would—but there, have I not said

enough to show the extreme utility of Miss Cobb to Miss Vane—the eminent services performed by one, at least, of the large class of hanger-on women?

“Breakfast is quite ready, dear.” She always addressed her friend thus affectionately. “Won’t you come in?” Miss Vane prepared to re-enter, then she turned to Mr. Rook.

“We dine at three, Mr. Rook—will you kindly join us?”

“Oh, thank you!”

“Now, pray do—I shall be so pleased!”

“*Do*,” cooed Miss Cobb. “I shall be *so* pleased!”

Could Septimus refuse such an invitation thus pressed upon him? Indeed, he could not; and, to do him justice, he never once dreamt of doing so.

Watching the receding ancles of Miss Vane—I admit she was proud of her feet—but perhaps, re-ascending from the garden to the house, a necessity existed for the

graceful drawing together and the slight elevation of her skirts;

"By George! this is a pretty thing!" said Mr. Septimus, lighting his cutty. "So I'm to eat my Sunday mutton with Miss Vane, am I? All right—I've no objection. Lord! what would the old governor say? But what would Ned give to be standing in my shoes? Shan't I have a lot to tell him when he comes to the office? What's he up to I wonder? Yes, she *is* pretty—no mistake about that. But equal to Sylvia Foster! Lor' bless you!"

And there went a murmur through Araminta Row and Arethusa Place, Pimlico, that No. 11 and 12 had been "atalking together over the wall;" and great indignation prevailed. It was too bad! It was shocking! It was most unneighbourly!

CHAPTER IX.

MISS AURELIA VANE AT HOME.

THERE might have been a notion passing through the mind of Miss Vane, proffering her hospitality, that her guest would render return for her courtesy in the way of amusement. With that slight and excusable alloy, the good-nature and friendliness of the action and the intention were perfect. And Mr. Rook's was certainly a pleasant face to see at one's table, bending over and consuming one's meat and drink : it was thoroughly kindly, and healthy, and stout, and English.

Not a sumptuous banquet—not served

with state or sauced with ceremony—but at least less theatrical than substantial. Real roast veal and bacon, with browned potatoes; and beer, to borrow a stage word, eminently “practicable:” procured by a dangerous rush, on the part of Mr. Boss, just as Chinery’s was closing at three o’clock for church-time, according to act of Parliament, and brought in the pewter. A good dinner, with plenty of it; and pancakes, with ample sugar and lemon, following the veal. Certainly there were difficulties and incongruities arising out of the repast and its serving, which were, to say the least, embarrassing. One of these was in regard to the precise status enjoyed by Mr. Boss in the household. It was never clear whether he was merely a waiter in attendance on the other diners, or whether he occupied the head of the table in the right of host and parent. He wore a white neckerchief, which certainly gave weight to the waiter notion on the one hand, while at the same

time it might be assumed as part of a host's dress of ceremony, and of compliment to the presence of Septimus. As further evidence in support of the host and father view of him, he was attired in a blue damask dressing-gown, of rather a faded hue and a bygone pattern, but which it was quite possible was the smartest garment in his wardrobe. He carved the joint of veal for the table, and helped himself,—and *this* looked like a host; though he appeared to eat with a voracity that had something furtive in it, as though he were quite open to question and objection in respect of his conduct; and he was always rising from his seat to change the plates of the others, to pour out beer, to fetch clean knives and forks—for all the world like a waiter. It must be conceded that the question was not easy of answer; while something of the same dilemma hung over Miss Cobb. She was a diner; but was she not also the cook? I have my suspicions on the subject; and, above all, a

steady conviction that she made the pancakes: from this nothing shall ever move me. Why did she always run in and out of the room, with that anxious air upon her face, which said "pancakes" as plainly as though she had spoken as much in words? And then how scorched her cheeks! I know what I think, and I know what Septimus thought about it. However, the fried batter was unquestionably very delicious.

Miss Vane and Septimus sat calmly at the table, unoccupied with its cares, which affected the others in so lively a manner. Once he had proffered assistance to Miss Cobb; but his aid was promptly declined by that lady.

"Good gracious me!—sit down, do!" she cried. "What do you mean by it? Pray, go on with your dinner!"

So there was no help for it but to sit still and devour his meal, attended by Mr. Boss and Adelaide, and conversing with Miss Vane in the intervals of the banquet. It is

fair to state that Miss Vane, in spite of the languor of her manner and the grace of her actions, as she hung over the roast veal, manifested a very admirable appetite, and took her fair share of Mr. Chinnery's excellent stout, patting her lips after her draughts with the most delicate gauzy sort of handkerchief that was ever seen, and that indeed appeared to be nearly all open-work lace border, and was held by its precise centre, so that its lace was available from every point of view. Mr. Rook, as we have suggested, was not a theatrical young gentleman, and had, indeed, enjoyed few opportunities of witnessing Miss Vane's admirable delineations. It would perhaps have surprised more regular frequenters of the Nonpareil, who had been accustomed to see the lady now and then sweep about in flowing satin trains in a grand white and gold arabesque and naked-cupid apartment, which the playbills called a "superb salon in the Chateau of the Marquis de St. Emi-

lion"—it would, perhaps, have surprised those habitués acquainted with her favourite representation of Marie, Comtesse de Chateau-Margot (she went mad, of course, in the third act, and let down her hair, and wore muslin ; it was a French piece, neatly moralised and adapted by Blank and Dash—the one knows a little French, I believe, and the other a little English ; so they translate capitally between them—that is, capitally for the London stage)—it would have amazed constant visitors on Miss Vane's evenings (I shall really never get through with this sentence), who formed notions of her private life from the magnificence of her stage career, to find that Miss Vane's house in Araminta Row comprised no "superb salons," or "gorgeously furnished apartments," or even "elegant modern drawing-rooms," but was, on the contrary, a very plain and homely, not to say mean and slatternly, dwelling. The chairs were of the cheap, cane-bottomed

order, the sofa was one of our old petrified, horsehair enemies—too long for sitting on, too short for reclining, and too hard for any known human purpose. There was a great plenty of anti-macassars about—the work of Adelaide—but as the washing of these had occurred long precedent to their introduction to the reader, they did not heighten the brilliance of the effect, by the soiled curl-paper sort of look they could not help communicating. Indeed, it is really a most supererogatory work that of adding dingy decorations of this kind to dingy furniture. It is as though a man with a dirty face were to put on a dirty collar, and fancy himself improved thereby ; while, in point of fact, increase of quantity can make no possible alteration in quality. You get more dirt, but you don't get any nearer cleanliness ; a plain fact enough, but people sometimes are very nearly forgetting it. There was a small gilt-framed glass over the fire-place—the gilt very black about the edges, and the

glass much freckled. Ragged peacock-feathers crowned this decoration. Conch shells were on the chimney piece—with crockery poodles, lucifer matches, a thimble, an inch of sealing-wax, a penny ink-bottle, a mishapen piece of china that was presumed to be a shepherd with a blue coat and bright buttons and a saffron lamb, and shadowy photographic portraits of Mr. Boss and Miss Cobb—terrible things. Miss Vane's portrait—taken at the same time—she had not been pleased with, and had consequently locked up safely in a drawer upstairs. She deemed these excellent likenesses—and Mr. Boss considered Miss Cobb's to be first-rate, and Miss Cobb regarded Mr. Boss's as admirable indeed; but individually they did not like the representations of themselves—indeed, could not see any likeness at all in them—but then of course one can't tell how one looks, and of course it's hard to say whether a thing is like one or not. There was, in addition to these works, a water-colour

drawing of Miss Vane in the character of "*Little Luke*, the cabin boy," in the successful drama of the "Wreck on the Reef, or a Life on the Ocean Wave." It was execrable as a piece of art, and possessed the additional merit of not being in the slightest degree like the original. But it had a pretty fashion-book sort of face, and a good deal of cobalt blue about the dress; so it was effective altogether, and framed and glazed accordingly, and hung up and admired extremely. "It was done by an amateur at Bristol," Mr. Boss informed Septimus; "it's clever, ain't it?—and like, too. He was a clever fellow, but they used to chaff him tremendous. Lor'! how he used to hang about the stage door! Awful spoony he was, to be sure. I don't know what became of him."

After dinner there was sherry for the ladies—sherry-wine Adelaide called it—and biscuits of the pic-nic order; with hot gin and water and Brazil nuts for the gentlemen.

"One tumbler, Boss, not another drop," Miss Vane said sternly. "Mix it for him, Adelaide, or else he'll make it too strong. Pray help yourself, Mr. Rook."

Mr. Boss looked moodily at this one glass to which he was limited, as though asking himself whether it were better to drink it up all at once, and so have done with it, or prolong his pleasure by imbibing it sip-wise.

We are all shoppy. The conversation became theatrical.

"They've got a new piece coming out to-morrow night at the Star and Garter—new effects, so they say, 'The Dream on the Raft.'"

"Oh, I know all about it," Mr. Boss remarks. "Boxford told me; there's nothing in it; they're going to work up again all the old things in that piece that failed—what was it called?—'The Sea of Troubles'—something. There's a good part in your line, I believe, for Miss Gregson." This to Miss Vane.

"Indeed! what is it?" with interest.

"*Stormy Petrel*, the pirate's son."

"She won't be able to do it. I know that," says Miss Vane.

"That she won't," adds Adelaide. "With *her* figure! I should like to see her do it."

"I can't go or I would," Miss Vane continues. "I am in the bills for three pieces to-morrow."

"Get an order from Boxford, Boss, and I'll go and see what's like," says Adelaide.

"It's a good part—I know that much.—So's Bagstock's. He plays the *Old Pirate*. The father and son shoot each other by mistake. The son is in the Royal Navy. They die in each other's arms, with the pirate's blood-red flag and the Union Jack waved at the back of them by Daffrey. That ought to bring the curtain down well, I should say.

"They tell me," says Adelaide, "that Bagstock's gout is so bad he won't be able to make much of it; and I'm sure his cough

is dreadful. The last time I heard him it was really quite painful, he could hardly get through with the part."

"Daffrey's got a good fall in the second act. He drops right down from the flies on to the stage. He'll kill himself some night."

Mr. Rook had been able to take little part in this discussion. Mr. Boss turned to him.

"I ought to know something about theatricals. I've been on the stage many a long year, now. Why, I played with Master Betty—the young Roscius—let me see, when was it? 1808—9—10? Ah! I forget."

Miss Cobb nodded and winked her entire disbelief in this story—which, indeed, did sound rather apocryphal—but the facial telegraphic signals of Adelaide nearly deprived Mr. Rook of all composure.

"Lord! how mad Kemble was! I had the honour of playing with the great John, sir, in the glorious tragedy of Macbeth."

"What part did you play, Boss?" asks Adelaide, incredulous.

"The head of the child in the apparition scene. Did you ever see Mr. and Mrs. Harry Johnston at Covent Garden?"

"Of course he didn't, Boss. How should he?"

"Ah! well—perhaps not—they were fine actors, though; but before his time, I daresay."

Mr. Rook, to do him justice, had never heard of those eminent performers.

"There was a boy named Harry Johnston at school," he said.

"Ah! it couldn't have been his son, though; because, you see, he hadn't any."

"The fact is," said Mr. Rook, apologetically, "I haven't been very theatrical myself; and, perhaps, to tell the truth, don't know much about actors and that. Why, I've never even been behind the scenes of a theatre—never, upon my word."

"You're a wicked young rascal enough, I

daresay," said Miss Cobb, introducing an observation of no particular application to the subject of Mr. Rook's discourse; but, in fact, she was genial over the sherry and biscuits, to say nothing of the precedent veal and pancakes.

"No, I'm not," says Septimus, blushing; "not that I'm aware of, at least." At which they all laugh, though no one knows why, particularly.

"You see, I've lived nearly all my life in the north—Yorkshire—there, that's my county."

"I knew it!—I was sure of it!" and Miss Cobb laughed immensely. Miss Vane repressed an inclination to yawn, and smiled unmeaningly instead.

"I've had no chance, you see, of knowing much about it, or seeing any plays or acting, or anything of that kind—for they don't do much of that sort of thing down in my part of the country—not but what if any of you are ever down there—any of you—I assure

you. I mean it, Miss Vane—I should be delighted to see you—and so—so—would the old governor, I'm certain;" but he did not say this very fervently; "and he's got some uncommon good claret, has the old governor."

"Ah!" says Mr. Boss, with elation in his eye, sipping from his tumbler recklessly. He had been drinking providently until now.

"And you might all come down to Doncaster Races, you know, and make a regular good day of it, and then come on to my part of the country. I'm not above fifty miles further on, and there's a railway up to within three miles of the governor's place."

But the party did not look as though they thought it quite so feasible a plan as did Septimus.

"Now there's a friend of mine—he's in the same office with me,"—Mr. Rook grew talkative,—“and he is really theatrical, and

knows all about it, you know—that is to say, he knows a good deal—and I assure you he's a very great admirer of yours, Miss Vane."

"Is he?" inquires that lady, with languid interest.

"That he is; you should hear him talk about your *Cracked Tom*—and he's always going to the Nonpareil—and he went to your last benefit—when you played 'the little middy,' you know. Lor'! how well you do that hornpipe, to be sure! And he got locked out in consequence—and was out all night—for his governor's a regular old Turk! I've never seen him—but that's what he is, so far as I can make out. Oh, he writes beautifully—poems and plays!"

"Indeed, what is his name?"

"His name is Erle. Edwin Erle."

"Erle? I don't think I know it;" and Miss Vane tries to recollect. Adelaide at once gives it up; she has not heard it before.

"Oh, he's such a nice fellow : you would like him so much. So handsome, too—at least I think so."

"What is he?" asks Adelaide. "Spades, or clubs, or hearts, or diamonds?"

"What's that?" Mr. Rook looks bewildered.

"Did you never tell fortunes with cards? Lor'!—they have neglected your education! Why, diamonds is a fair man, hearts is one not so fair, clubs is a dark man, spades is a very dark man. Now do you understand?"

"I tried my fortune twice last night," remarks Miss Vane, "and it came the king of diamonds each time. Wasn't it curious?"

"Very!" And Adelaide is much impressed.

"Well, I suppose," and Mr. Rook has been considering the subject for some two or three minutes—"I suppose Edwin is what you would call diamonds?"

"Has he blue eyes and light hair?" asks Miss Cobb.

"Yes."

"Then, of course, he's diamonds. You're clubs, you know!"

"Oh, am I?—well, that's all right. Where was I?—Oh, he writes plays splendidly! There's one called the 'Necromancer.' Oh, it's beautiful—such language!—and the incantation scene, quite awful!—it makes a fellow's blood run cold! It's in verse, you know—at least he says so—blank verse he calls it. I thought it was prose myself, till he put me right. He read me some of it at the office one day when old Deacon—that's our chancery clerk—when old Deacon was out. Very fine, though there's no rhyme to the verse."

"Is it in five acts?"

"Yes, if it isn't six. I won't be quite sure."

"Ah! is there a good part for the leading lady? But it won't do for the Nonpareil, that's pretty clear. He'd better take it to the Museum Theatre at Clerkenwell; we

don't have blank verse and five acts at the Nonpareil—the audience wouldn't stand it."

"Oh, he's lots of other plays: 'Diana Vivian,' 'King, Queen, Knave,' and others. I've never read them, but I believe they're splendid!"

"Any part for me in them?" inquired Miss Vane.

"Oh, dear, yes, I should say so. And you should hear Ned read! So fine and grand, spouting it out, for all the world, as they do at the theatre. And he does so admire your acting, Miss Vane!—quite raves about it. I wish you'd let me introduce him some time when he's at my place next door."

Mr. Rook appeared to forget that his own acquaintance with the lady dated not from several years back, but from the previous evening only.

"I shall be very happy," said Miss Vane, rather listlessly.

"Where does he live?" inquired Miss Cobb.

"Gloucester Terrace, Regent's Park. His father's an awfully rich old fellow, I believe, though I've never seen him."

Miss Cobb left the room for a minute. She returned with a bouquet in her hand. She looked towards Miss Vane with evident meaning. There appeared to be a quiet understanding between them, though Miss Vane did murmur "Nonsense, Adelaide!" In the palpable occupation of the company Mr. Boss furtively mixed a second tumbler, with rather a larger proportion of spirit in it than Miss Cobb had permitted him on the former occasion.

"Do you know anything of this?" Adelaide inquired of Septimus.

"That bouquet?—No!—Can't say I do."

"It was left at the stage door last night," explained Miss Vane.

"And it hasn't been the first by a good many," Adelaide went on. "But you don't know it?"

"No! (Oh, if I dared to say that Ned

had left it, how it would help him on with Miss Vane !)"

"Nor this writing?" and she exhibited the address of Miss Vane inscribed on the cover of the bouquet.

"Well, I *do* think I've seen that writing before—or some—very like it!" Was he telling truth or falsehood? He blushed very much. They understood that blush as confirmative of his recognition of the writing.

"Oh! You think you've seen writing like that before!—and what do you think of this?" and Miss Cobb exhibited a superb bracelet, all dead, yellow gold, and garnets, and pearls, and diamonds.

"Ned couldn't stand that sort of thing any more than I could," thought Septimus.

"Have you ever seen that before?"

"No!—I never have," said Septimus, solemnly.

"I shall be happy to see your friend, Mr. Rook—of course any friend of yours—any

time that he may be in this neighbourhood, and to hear his play read, or read it myself; and if I can assist him in any way—not that I've any interest at the theatre, none whatever, quite the contrary—and if I were to suggest a new piece Pawker would be sure to refuse it rather than not, he is so spiteful and so jealous, though I might perhaps play it on my benefit or in the provinces; but I'm sure if I could help him, or any friends of yours, Mr. Rook, I certainly would. Will you like my order for to-morrow night?—you shall have it with pleasure. Write it out, Adelaide, and I'll sign it.”

“I've made it all smooth for Ned—at all events,” Mr. Septimus congratulated himself—“he can go in now and win if he likes—though he is a fool if he does, I can't help thinking that.”

“Adelaide! Boss has got another tumbler!—take it away from him, take it away from him directly—take it away!—” but an accident saved Mr. Boss.

"Why, here's godpapa!" cried Miss Cobb, and a fashionably attired gentleman entered the room. Old or young? Very old—very young. It was that great public favourite, Flipperton, who has been the most delightful light comedian of the stage for the last fifty years. He has, oh! such a worn, lined haggard old face, with such a hard fixed smile upon it; and the favourite arching of the eyebrows and closing of the eyelids, to re-open them suddenly with a flash!—it has been his pet trick, oh! ever so long—and such an extremely youthful flaxen wig—a "diamond man," according to Miss Cobb's view of complexion, with a pleasant burst of curls brought over either ear, a graceful sweep across the forehead, and oh! such a deliciously young and accurate parting of his back hair. He is very lean indeed, but, with the aid of the tailor and judicious padding here and there, his figure is still intensely juvenile; he is youthful in dress even to his shirt collars. Such a delightful

short blue coat, with peg-top sleeves, and pearl-grey trousers of like form, a white cambric handkerchief bursting out like a blossoming camelia on his swelling chest, lavender gloves—he declares that “seven-and-a-half” is his size, “ladies’ gloves”—and he withdraws them carefully, to shew his small, old, thin white hands—there is just a soupçon of a tremble about them—and his elegant serpent ring, the big turquoise and diamond ring, on *his engaged finger*—he is so very young; and his hat is glossy as a race-horse, and his boots shine like mirrors! He enters the room with such a young-man swagger, almost a school-boy swagger, and pulls down his wristbands over his white knuckles, and pats his side curls, and eases his shirt collar, with the juvenile degagé necktie, and brings his blue ring well to the front: He never loses his footlight manner—always smart and airy, giddy, fluttery, gay—intensely young and exceeding old!

He kisses Miss Cobb on the forehead, she

is his god-child; when, how, or why that arrangement was come to, is an inscrutable mystery to all concerned, probably even including Flipperton and Adelaide; he blows a kiss, in his most genial manner, to Aurelia; he shakes hands with Boss—rallies him in a sort of facetious stage fashion, pushing him in the ribs now and then, inquiring after the health of Mr. Garrick and Mrs. Siddons. He is a great, a profuse wag, is Flipperton; he bows his best to Septimus, waving his glossy hat and smoothing his flaxen locks with that eternal property of his, the white hand with the blue ring; and a pleasant afternoon and evening set in. For to do old-young Flipperton justice—he is called “Flip” by his intimates—he is very quick, and witty, and amusing. In fact, he’s perpetually playing over and over his light comedy parts: they have so grown into and become part of himself, the poor fellow positively cannot help it. So he chattered and prattled and smiled and

laughed in his best theatrical real manner, that he could not fail to be singularly curious, and amusing, and very new to Septimus.

“What I shall have to tell Ned!” exclaimed Mr. Rook, as he turned his key in his lock and re-entered his own dwelling. “I have dined with Aurelia Vane, and done him a good turn there, I’m thinking—and I’ve been introduced to Miss Adelaide Cobb—and I’ve made friends with Boss. Lor’! how bad he was again!—and I’ve actually seen Flipperton in private life! Think of that! He’s a funny one! How he does make a fellow laugh!”

Then, as he got into bed: “I wonder what the old governor would say to it all? Ah!”

CHAPTER X.

MR. ROOK DINES IN GLOUCESTER TERRACE.

It is a dreadful thing to be the possessor of a very admirable story, and yet to be unable to approach the one ear of all others you would select for to tell it to. It is a most annoying, worrying, irritating thing. You take the greatest pains to keep the story fresh and new, to preserve all its delicate *nuances*. You keep it closely wrapped up in your bosom, to prevent any of the crisp, sharp edgings being rubbed off or injured. You fidget yourself to remember it, and cherish it, and maintain it in its full integrity—and all for nothing! Accident

persists in holding you asunder from the only person to whom the narrative can be confided. And so the interesting food perishes in the larder of the memory; for there is no salting some stories to preserve them—the story fades, and rots, and dies! A good thing utterly unavailable, a lost prize, and the anticipated joy comes to be accounted an actual responsibility and pain.

Burthening his memory with nice details of his adventures, for the express gratification of his friend, Edwin Erle—though, of course, there is ample compensation to the story-teller in the interest awakened in his audience—it was greatly to Mr. Rook's discomfort and dismay to find his fellow-clerk's seat at the office again unoccupied. He was ready to tear his hair with vexation. And all the good things treasured for their mutual enjoyment—the omnibus—the lady and the missing sixpence—the "Sun in the Sands"—Boss—Adelaide—Flipperton—what was he now to do with these? Should

he make a confidant of old Deacon? Bah! it was not to be thought of. But where *was* Edwin all this time? What *could* he be doing? Mr. Rook was able to preserve silence on the subject no longer.

"Mr. Deacon, do you know anything of Edwin?"

"I do not."

"Is he ill, do you think?"

"I don't know."

("What apathy! This comes of being a chancery clerk, I suppose," Mr. Rook murmured.)

"Have you asked Mr. Jeffrey?"

"I have not. I don't consider it any business of mine."

This implied, as plainly as words could, "And I don't consider it any business of yours." But Mr. Rook was not to be easily put down.

"But don't you think it very curious?—very odd indeed? Because *I* do. Ain't you *going* to ask Mr. Jeffrey about him?"

"I'm not. You can ask him yourself, I suppose, if you feel inclined."

"By George, and I *will*, too!"

"I hope you're getting on with that Counter State of Facts for the Master's office. It ought to be carried in next week. I think you've been quite long enough over it, and I want you to be going on with the petition in Blenkinsop's lunacy when it's finished."

"Thank you," answered Mr. Rook, with an ironic courtesy, that was quite thrown away upon the chancery clerk; he did not appear to regard the prospective going on with the petition in Blenkinsop's lunacy as a very great incentive to complete the Counter State of Facts for the Master's office. Indeed, he could not refrain from now and then surreptitiously shaking his fist at old Deacon menacingly, though he contented himself, in a paroxysm of his wrath, with striking the whole of the papers off his own desk at one sweeping blow. He was in a

great rage; he would have torn his hair if it had not been too short to allow of any chance of a hopeful hold being taken of it. He grew calmer after the punishment of his papers.

"I wonder what sort of a humour Jeffrey's in this morning? He's been chopping round all sorts of ways of late. I can't make him out at all. Sometimes he's as civil as soap, and then again he gets as surly as blazes. Never mind—I'll risk it."

He smoothed his short hair, arranged his shirt-collar, pulled down his waistcoat, and walked into Jeffrey's room. An expression of amazement sat upon Mr. Deacon's old owl face.

Jeffrey was busy writing. Mr. Rook stood for a minute or two unnoticed. He coughed behind his hand to attract attention.

"Well?"

And Jeffrey turned sharply round upon him.

Slightly embarrassed, Mr. Rook began—

“Pray, excuse me. I am interrupting you, I daresay; but, if you please, is Mr. Edwin ill?”

“I believe not.”

“He has not been here for a few days, and I thought—”

“Thought what?”

“That is, I mean I was anxious to know if he was ill, or anything had happened to prevent his coming?”

“Something has happened. What of that? What is it to you?”

“We sit at the same desk; we are articulated clerks in the same office. I hope I may be allowed to feel some interest in him—I *do* feel an interest in him—as he would in me, probably, in like circumstances.”

And Mr. Rook spoke his mind stoutly.

“You are troubling yourself with what does not concern you.”

“Perhaps. But I don't think Edwin would say so.”

"Go on with your work." And Jeffrey pointed to the door.

Mr. Rook had no alternative but to retire.

"Well, have you had your nose pulled?" asked old Deacon.

"No, as it happens, I have not had my nose pulled."

And Mr. Rook made a grimace expressive of contempt for, and mockery of, Mr. Deacon.

"And where is Mr. Edwin? What is he doing?"

"I'm going on with the Counter State of Facts. Don't talk to me, please."

And Mr. Rook plunged in amongst his chancery papers.

Soon after Jeffrey's bell was heard. Mr. Rook was wanted. Jeffrey's manner was quite changed. He had lost his sternness and frigidity—he was quite bland and friendly.

"It's a bad habit to get into, Mr. Rook,"

said he, "that of asking questions and being curious about matters that don't come strictly within the routine of business; though in your case I am bound to say there are many excuses for your inquiries. I am speaking in a general way, you understand. To be too inquisitive, or to appear to be so, is most unbusinesslike—not to say ungentlemanly. The people out of doors are perpetually seeing mysteries in the simplest things. It is a faculty the vulgar possess in a high degree. In our profession, Mr. Rook, there are no mysteries; in real life, Mr. Rook, there are no mysteries. The matters that appear to be most difficult of explanation are generally capable of the simplest solution. I don't want you to go away with the idea, therefore, or to disseminate such an absurd notion, that there is anything secret in Edwin's absence from the office. He has been applying a little too much, perhaps, and his health is less robust than is yours. I don't think you

have been suffering from over-work, however." And Jeffrey smiled not ungraciously. "Of course there is a medium in all things. Edwin may be absent a day or two longer, or he may be here to-day, or to-morrow ; really, I have no precise details of his plans. But a little rest and a little change will do him good. In fact, they benefit us all, though unhappily we cannot all avail ourselves of them. I want to go out of town myself very much—indeed, I am very far from well, and quite long for a little quiet and country air, but it cannot be. I'm tied by the leg here pretty tightly. Have you heard from Yorkshire lately? How is your excellent father? Quite well? That's well. And your brothers all? Ah, there's nothing like a country gentleman's life after all. It's the simplest, and the purest, and the best, alike for body and soul. Well, we understand each other about Edwin? That's all right. And now, what are you going to do with yourself this

evening? No, no, you're not engaged, I know. Come and have a quiet cutlet with me in Gloucester Terrace. I would say the club, only I must go home on my father's account. Don't look at your dress, that will do very well indeed—there will only be myself, I daresay. Ned may turn up, but I make no promise about him. All very quiet—for ours is, as you know, a sad sick house, and my poor father is a great sufferer still. You'll come? That's right. At six o'clock; and after dinner we can go round to the stables and look at my sorrel mare, and a new grey hack I think of buying—I should like to have your opinion upon it. I won't detain you longer now."

There was a blush of triumph, and a look of elation, on the face of Septimus, as he returned to his Counter State of Facts, and informed Mr. Deacon that he was going that day to dine with Jeffrey, in Gloucester Terrace. That functionary was indeed amazed, though he said little; and he went out soon after

to have a look at the Master of the Rolls, probably by way of a sedative to his disturbed intelligence.

And why had Jeffrey troubled himself with this unaccustomed courtesy and hospitality? He was muttering,

"They are more intimate than I had any idea of. The cub from the country," (he was unpolite enough to allude to Septimus in his absence,) "may know something about our vagabond. Yes, it's worth trying. An evening with him will be a bore, unquestionably; but I daresay I can be rid of him early. We don't care a curse for each other—that's one good thing; but I may get something out of him, and his Yorkshire people will think it kind and friendly of me—and we've some good clients down there. I must pump him, gently though, conciliatingly. I don't think we should get much out of him by a strict cross examination."

"Jeffrey's a much jollier fellow than I

ever thought he was, away from the office. I suppose that's what it is, he feels obliged to come the strict and stern over one there, to keep the clerks under, and that. A regular brick I call him, now. Ned never gave me any idea he was such a good sort of fellow as this. I wish Ned was here—what fun it would be! What stunning port! I think it almost beats the old governor's. And what a jolly good dinner—it beats the 'Hen' in Fleet Street. I feel as tight, and warm, and comfortable, and snug, as ever I wish to be."

Some such thoughts as these did Mr. Rook enjoy, as he sat opposite to Jeffrey Erle in the grim parlour in Gloucester Terrace. Septimus sipped his wine with a gusto and delectation that did him infinite credit. Jeffrey, it must be owned, looked slightly bored, though this was not perceptible to Septimus. Indeed, to do him justice, Jeffrey had been greatly amusing during dinner, and had quite won the heart of his

guest. He had talked about horses as though he had been a veterinary surgeon; he had retailed turf stories learnt at the club, to the great delight and surprise of Septimus, whose loud crowing laugh of unrestrained enjoyment it was quite a new sensation to hear in that house. He had even ventured to talk a little about the prize-ring, but here he found himself much below the level or information of his visitor. But he had learnt nothing yet about Edwin.

"So you like London life, Mr. Rook?"

"Oh yes, indeed, what I've seen of it."

"A pleasant change for you; but you must now and then feel yourself rather solitary in this great city, so far from your family and friends—though you have friends, no doubt, in London?"

"Yes, a few; sometimes in the evening I don't know exactly what to do with myself."

"No, precisely—it would be then you would most feel it; for, as you say," (though

Mr. Rook had said nothing of the kind), "one cannot be always at one's books and papers. Fortunately, there are plenty of amusements in London."

"But I hate to go to places of amusement by myself."

"Well, it *is* dull work. I ought to know, for I've tried it often enough. Still, of course you have companions of your own age. Edwin, for instance—at least I think I've heard him say he is often with you." (A sheer fabrication.)

"Yes, we're about together sometimes, though he's much cleverer than I am, you know. I'm not up to his mark, I know that."

"You do yourself injustice, Mr. Rook. The wine is with you."

"No. I always feel it when we go to the theatre; he knows everything, how, I don't know—all the people's names—what they're going to do—when they're going to fight, or die, and that—where all the

music's taken from—everything you can think of.”

“Yes, he's very fond of the theatre. The Nonpareil, isn't that his favorite house? Or is it the Star and Garter?”

“The Nonpareil.”

“Ah, they've clever acting there very often, I'm told. Isn't Grimshaw there? I remember seeing him once, and I thought him a fine performer. I can't remember what he played now, nor the name of the play; but it struck me at the time as very good indeed. Oh, Grimshaw's at the Royal Arms Theatre now, is he?”

“But the performer Edwin likes so much is Miss Vane—Aurelia Vane.”

“Indeed! I've heard her name. And is she really very good?”

“Is she not! Ask Ned, he'll talk to you for hours about her—her grace, and her poetry, and her attitudes, and passion, and all that; more than ever I could see in her. Why, he writes poetry to her—raves about

her ! Why, he's over head and ears in love with her. So it seems to me."

"In love with her!—you think so?" Mr. Septimus was too busy with his wine-glass to notice with what a staring, breathless interest Jeffrey was hanging on his answers now. Jeffrey rose from his seat, and rang the bell. "Empty that decanter, we'll have some more wine up."

"Thank you, but I think I've had almost as much as is good for me."

"Oh, another glass or two will do you no sort of harm. Besides, you country gentlemen stand the bottle in a way that quite puts us Londoners to the blush. We grow enervated and susceptible in the fret of our busy, toilsome, unhealthy lives. For you the robust vigor that defies age, and illness, and port wine. Help yourself."

Thus appealed to, Mr. Rook could not resist filling his glass. He would have considered himself a discredit to Yorkshire

breeding had he failed to comply with Jeffrey's invitation.

"So you fancy Ned is in love with this pretty actress?"

"I don't fancy—I'm pretty sure about it. But has he said nothing to you about it all?"

"No, not that I remember. I think not. But perhaps he wouldn't like to mention it to me. You see there's a good many years difference in our ages, and he might not care to speak to me upon such a subject."

Septimus did not perceive that there might be an objection, on the same account, to his making too many revelations to Jeffrey.

"And has he seen her often? Do they meet often? What says she to his passion, love, fancy—what am I to call it?"

"Bless you, I don't know that he has ever seen her off the stage."

"Indeed!" And Jeffrey was evidently disappointed.

"As for speaking to her, I'm sure he never has—but still he may, whenever he likes. I can manage that."

"How, pray? You quite interest me, Mr. Rook. Fill your glass. I assure you, this wine will do you no sort of harm."

And soon Jeffrey was in possession of Mr. Rook's story of his adventures in connection with Araminta Row, Pimlico. Mr. Rook was really thankful, with the assistance of the port wine, to dispossess himself of this amusing recital. Jeffrey's was a less sympathetic ear than Ned's, he thoroughly understood; but really he had arrived at that pitch, he was grateful for any auditor, and would soon have been obliged to have gone out in the street, and force his narrative upon the first man he might encounter. Jeffrey certainly laughed over the story, and appeared to enjoy it immensely.

"This is very good, Mr. Rook—really very good indeed! Then you think of introduc-

ing Miss Vane to her admirer—bringing the idol and votary to a *tête-à-tête*. Upon my word, it's very funny!"

"You don't think there is any objection, do you?" Mr Rook was struck somehow with a suspicious pang. "You don't think it would be to Ned's injury, in any way, do you? Because I wouldn't do it for the world, if you thought so—if there was any danger of that. Only I thought, you know, as he'd written plays, and poetry, and that, you know; and he might like to bring them out, and that isn't so easy as people think—at least, he says so, I don't pretend to know myself; I thought this seemed a chance it was well worth while his trying."

Jeffrey scrutinized his guest.

"How well these country fellows stand their liquor," he muttered; then aloud,

"You're quite right, Mr. Rook. Spoken most reasonably, and sensibly, and kindly, towards Edwin, I'm sure. No. I see no objection to the course you propose adopt-

ing. I think altogether that it is perhaps the best thing, under the circumstances, that can be done. The decanter's with you. Of course *we* know"—and Jeffrey stood up in a senatorial attitude, with his hands under his coat tails—"of course *we* know, as men of the world, well acquainted with its usages and conventions, that such a passion, or fancy, or a whim—call it which you please—as Edwin appears to be entertaining for this pretty lady at the Nonpareil, is not very wise—is, in fact, very *young* indeed. I may call it, I think, a foolish business—perhaps a very foolish business. The question arises how we should treat things of this kind. *We* know that opposition is not always discreet—frequently does more harm than good—frequently adds more fuel to the fire. To the young—and Edwin, after all, is a mere boy—opposition is often an encouragement; for it magnifies, it gives importance, to the object and its pursuit; and what has often commenced as a trivial

passing folly, is thus often forced and swollen into a confirmed error and positive sin. I believe it was St. Evremonde who said that he conquered his passions by indulging them."

("I never heard of such a saint," thought Septimus; "but I daresay it's all right—Jeffrey's a wonderful clever fellow.")

"I don't quite go with St. Evremonde altogether," and Jeffrey smiled amiably; "but I think this may be a case for the adoption of his maxim, in a small sort of way, at any rate. *We* will humour Ned—we will conquer his fancy by indulging it. Introduce him to Miss Vane—of course, that is, I should be strictly understood to mean, if there is nothing against her character in other respects. I don't see why an actress shouldn't be a very respectable member of society, though of course in a lower circle than that in which it is our privilege to move—and, with such conditions, introduce Ned to Miss Vane. Let him bring

out his plays at the Nonpareil, by all means, if he can; let him make love to the fair Aurelia to his heart's content—till he's quite tired of it. He soon will be, I've no doubt. I understand that actresses on and off the boards are very different creatures. But we'll drink her health—but we'll drink her health! What say you? Fill your glass. 'Aurelia Vane;' and we'll couple Ned—'Edwin and Aurelia.' Upon my word, a very pretty toast!"

The expression upon Jeffrey's face was not very pleasant as he drained his glass.

"A foolish business, however. *We* understand that, Mr. Rook."

"Well, I think so," says Septimus, his native candour aided by port wine; "I think he's a flat to moon about Miss Vane, when there's another woman over head and ears in love with him—who beats Miss Vane all to fits in point of beauty. I think so at least."

"Indeed? And who is that?"

"Ned's cousin—Miss Foster—Sylvia Foster."

"You've seen her?"

"Oh, yes, often—that is, two or three times. *There's* beauty, if you like!—*there's* a figure!—*there's* a foot!"

Jeffrey, with a tremulous, angry hand, took up the decanter. He seemed about to fling it at the head of his guest. He thought better of it, and filled his own glass, spilling some of the wine on the table.

"You admire her, then?"

"I do. I believe you. I never saw any one come up to her—never any that could get within a length of her! There! I ain't a sentimental fellow, I know. I can't write love-letters, or get hold of the right sort of grammar, or language, and that, to express what I want to say. I never could do a line of poetry—not even the first line, before you come to the rhyming part of it, you know. But there—she's the woman for my money!—that's the girl I love! I

don't mind telling you. No mistake at all about it! Right down steady, settled love! There, I love Sylvia Foster! We'll drink her health if you like. Fill up. 'Syl.' You can couple me with it if you like!"

"*You love Sylvia Foster! You!*" And the look of rage, and disgust, and hatred, in Jeffrey's face was something tremendous. But the port wine was affecting Mr. Rook's vision, and he did not notice it.

"I do. Right again. But, lor'! there—what's the use? What does she care for me—or for you, for that matter—or for any one? She loves Ned, and none but him!"

"You think so?" Jeffrey asked, with glaring eyes and white face.

"I'm sure of it." Jeffrey was swayed by an uncontrollable anger.

Suddenly a sharp, loud cry rung through the house, more of a wild beast's yell than a human voice.

"Great heaven! what's that?" and the

gentlemen in the parlour started up, silenced and sobered.

There was the noise of some one running downstairs. In an instant the parlour door was flung open, as Jeffrey moved towards it. Collis entered, pale, and breathless, and agitated.

("What's the row, I wonder," murmured Septimus. "I wonder what I ought to tip that butler chap—is a shilling enough, or ought I to make it half-a-crown?")

"Please, Mr. Jeffrey, sir!" Collis cried out. "Oh, if you please, sir, would you step upstairs. Master's took very bad—very bad, indeed! Did you hear him scream? He seems going out of his head, like, and is hollering ever so."

"I'll go up directly, Collis. Is there a light there? Stay one moment, Mr. Rook; I'll rejoin you again directly. I am afraid my father is taken very ill. Pray, don't be alarmed, or go away until I have seen you."

And Jeffrey quitted the room, leaving Septimus alone with the decanter.

"I wonder what's the matter?" quoth the solitary guest, eyeing the port wine. "That's very good ; but it strikes me I've had a little too much of it."

CHAPTER XI.

A SICK MAN.

JEFFREY entered the room on the first floor, which, since his father's illness, had been used as a bed-room.

He found the old man sitting up in bed, supported by the housekeeper, Mrs. Beaver, and a nurse, Mrs. Coope, hired from the Middlesex Hospital, on the recommendation of Dr. Turner.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Beaver?" Jeffrey asked.

"It's his heart, I think, sir. He has cried out once before like that, though not quite

so bad ; but he will be better now, I think, when he gets his breath again."

" Better ! Send for Dr. Turner at once ! "

" He knew of the former attack, sir, and was prepared for its return. Mrs. Coope was instructed how to treat it."

Mrs. Coope, a small lady, with a sallow complexion, a hook nose, jet-black eyes and eye-brows, and a jet-black crisply curling wig, restrained by a fillet of black velvet, bowed acquiescence and acknowledgment with a placid grimace.

So the old man was held in a sitting posture in his bed, with a chintz dressing-gown thrown hurriedly over his shoulders. He was trembling all over, and breathing with extreme difficulty. The painfulness of the effort brought out a profuse damp on his forehead, and moistened his thin, crumbled white hair. He gave no glance toward Jeffrey. He was staring at the bed-clothes, in a vacant, abstracted, scared way ; and his

thin fingers clutched, almost convulsively, the hands of those supporting him.

"Have you no medicine to give him for this?" asked Jeffrey, much moved and alarmed.

"He can't swaller nothing now, sir. We must wait abit. When he's better, he can have anything he chooses to fancy."

"Did Dr. Turner say he might have anything?"

Mrs. Coope gave a slight inclination of her head. Jeffrey looked into her jet eyes curiously. His lip trembled, as he turned away from the bed with a low moan of sorrow.

"Death! Yes, it is death! That woman has looked upon it often—how often!—and knows it well, and cannot be mistaken."

"Who's there?" asked the invalid, in a husky, quavering whisper.

"It's Mr. Jeffrey, sir, come to see how you are," said Mrs. Beaver, with a false air of cheerfulness, and rather as though she

were talking to a child. "See, there he is, by the curtain—don't you know him?—Mr. Jeffrey—your eldest son?"

But Mr. Erle did not appear to heed; still he breathed with less pain, his fingers relaxed their hold, and commenced to straggle over and pluck the bed-clothes, as though in search of something.

"What is it, sir?—what are you looking for?—your drink?"

He glared at her angrily, and shook his head. Then he cried, huskily, "Handkerchief!"

They could not find his own at first, and some one proffered a white one. His rage at this seemed to pass all bounds, and he beat upon the bed with impotent fury, whining piteously like a suffering animal. At last his own handkerchief was found and given to him, and he patted his parched, blue lips with it. It was a red silk handkerchief. Mrs. Beaver whispered to Jeffrey,

"He has that, because then he can't see

the blood. It makes him almost mad when he sees that."

"Has there been blood from the lungs this morning?"

"Terrible bad!"

The old man's hand was again straggling and plucking in search of something. They looked at each other—then at him. They could not read his wishes, and were again obliged to ask what he sought.

"Babette."

"Why, here she is. See! she's made a hollow for herself on the bed—and is all snug, and warm, and fast asleep."

He was just stretching out an arm to its full length to pat his favourite.

"Milk—saucer," he said again.

And they were obliged to lift Babette's saucer on to the bed and place it by her side. He had recovered his breath now in a great measure. They were able now to remove their arms and prop him up with pillows instead. He saw Jeffrey at length,

and nodded to him in a strange, vacant way. Jeffrey took his hand. The old man merely suffered it. He made no responsive action.

"Yes, yes," he muttered. "I'm better—Oh, much better. Soon be well now. Ugh—how dry my throat is! Nurse, give me some drink—the nice drink—with the wine in it, mind that; not that beastly stuff in the bottle. Quick—quick! Lord! how slow you are!"

He took it so eagerly, wrenching it from the nurse's hand, that he spilt half of it on the bed.

"For shame of you being so rude, and so greedy! Now, see what you've done."

But he gave a shriek of laughter only at her words. Very painful to hear was that laugh—and it made Jeffrey shiver.

"He's mad!" he muttered.

"Don't you do that again," said Mrs. Coope; "we ain't going to have none of that here—you know. We don't want no laughing nor nothing of that sort, disturbing the

neighbours and that. Why, I should be quite ashamed of myself if I was you." But he took no heed of her; he turned again to Jeffrey—staring at him very hard indeed.

"Edwin! Edwin!" suddenly he cried.

"He's not here," answered Jeffrey.

"Where is he? Where is he?" he cried excitedly.

"Hush!—be composed—he'll soon come."

"I want him—now, now, now!—not soon. Where is he? *You* know. Go for him, fetch him—drag him here!"

"He's not in the house." And Jeffrey tried to soothe him; "but he soon will be. You'll soon see him now—compose yourself. You'll soon see him, now. We'll send for him."

"You *will* send for him?"

"That is—I should say—we *have* sent for him."

"It's a lie!—you know it's a lie! You think, because I'm sick here, and old and helpless—and dying here—perhaps—God

knows! Yet, no—not that—not dying—” and he lost the sequence of his thoughts, and beat upon his pillows in a fury at his own want of memory. Soon he subsided again into composure, leaning forward to stroke Babette. Then he tossed himself back upon his pillows, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. How yellow his poor worn old face looked by the side of the bright crimson of the silk!

There was a pause of some minutes, only broken—so it seemed to Jeffrey—by the husky breathing of the sick man, and the loud ticking of his gold watch in the pocket over his head. Then he commenced rolling his head about from side to side on the pillow. Then he started up again, possessed by a new idea.

“Her picture!”

“Whose?” inquired Jeffrey.

“*Her's*—my wife's. Bring it here—quick!—hold it up at the foot of the bed.”

"What, the one downstairs in the dining room?"

"Fool! Idiot!" and then the old man shrieked again with a laugh or a cry—it was hard to say which it was—that rang through the house. So shrill was it, Jeffrey involuntarily raised his hands to his ears.

"Hush!—hush!—not that noise! How dare you," interposed Mrs. Coope. "What's all this nonsense about pictures? What is it you want?"

"*Her* picture."

"Whose?"

"Gabrielle's."

They looked at each other. "Master Hedwin's mother," explained Mrs. Beaver, in a whisper, to the nurse. "Where is the picter?" asked the nurse. "Better fetch it if you can, or he won't be quiet else." "It used to be in Edwin's room; wasn't it, Mrs. Beaver?" "It's not there now. I suppose Master Hedwin took it away with him." So Mrs. Beaver replied to Jeffrey.

"What's all this whispering about?" cried the invalid, angrily.

"The picture's not here," said Jeffrey; "not to be found. I believe Edwin has taken it away with him."

"Taken it!—taken it away!"

"Hush! (Humour him; he'll forget it directly). It will soon be here. Some one's gone to fetch it. We'll soon have it here, and hang it up wherever you like—that is, if you're good, and don't make a noise."

The old man glared at her angrily.

"Don't tell lies," he said, bluntly. "I understand it. Ned's gone away. He's left his poor sick, helpless old father. He doesn't care for him—no one cares for him. And he's taken *her* portrait—Gabrielle's. Poor little Gabrielle! Well, well, she was his mother. Yes, his mother. Perhaps he had a claim to it. But who sent him away? Tell me that! Who sent him away? I did not. No; they can't say that of me.

I did not. Poor Gabrielle! Poor baby Ned!" Then, after a long silence, he said, fiercely, "Jeffery, *you* did this!"

"My dear father—"

"Bah! I tell you, *you* did this. You know it—you know it! Don't tell me!" Then suddenly, "Turn those fools of women out of the room. I hate to have fools gaping and staring round me, as though I were a show. Out with them! Never heed what they say. Kick them out if they won't go else! Out with them!" Thus enjoined, Mrs. Beaver quitted the room. The nurse affected also to go, but came noiselessly back from the door, concealing herself behind the ample curtains of the bed. But the invalid was too quick for her; he darted suddenly at the curtain, tore it down, and, with a shrill cry of triumph, exposed her.

"Be off!" he exclaimed in a fury; "be off, or I'll kick you out myself!" She was compelled to withdraw.

"Now, Jeffrey, bolt the door. Quick, man, quick, or they'll be back and break in. Quick! Have you locked it? Bring me the key, do. Now, try the door. Let me hear you. Yes, it is locked. Come here—close. Now tell me, where is Ned?"

"He went away that night, you remember? The last night you were up dressed and in the drawing-room."

"Yes, I remember. He went away then—never to return. Didn't he say so. *Never!* Oh! cruel, cruel, cruel, Jeffrey! you did that!—you goaded me on!"

"No, father, no."

"I tell you, you did. You made me nearly mad between you—nearly mad. But I tell you he must come back—he must be found!"

"Yes, yes; be satisfied. He will come back—he shall be found!"

"You tell me this to humour me, and then think to let it drop and forget it! How cruel! Jeffrey, how unkind! Yes, I re-

member ; it was about Désirée we quarrelled—Désirée Barielle and her child. Ah ! I forget the name now—some fancy name. Sybil ? was it. Sylphide ? No.”

“Sylvia.” And Jeffrey’s lips trembled as the word came from them.

“That’s it !—that’s it !—Sylvia ! Yes. What ! You know her ? Heaven, what a white face the boy’s got. Why, it’s *you* that are ill, not I ! No, not I. I’m hearty. Give me my stick and coat. I’ll get up. You undress, you poor pale fool, and take my place in the bed. Yes—Sylvia. I remember seeing her once. Rather pretty, but with horrid hair ; pretty, but nothing near her mother—nothing to Gabrielle.” Again he paused to pass the red handkerchief over his sallow face.

“He was in a rage, wasn’t he ?—a great rage ? So was I, in one of my tempers. I know I was. One of my tremendous passions. I’m sure of it. And I can get into a passion—I can. He didn’t storm as I

did. He was calm ; but all white and trembling, with such a flash in his eyes as Gabrielle had sometimes, though she never spoke a word—always did as she was bid, but with pale lips, and such fire in her eyes. He was quite wrong—quite wrong. I said nothing but what was true—quite true—though it was all long, long ago ; and I had better have held my tongue, only I was in one of my great passions!” Then he stopped again.

“Give me some more of that drink—that in the china jug. Yes, that’s it! You must bring him back, Jeffrey—I say you must bring him back!”

“I will, father—I have told you I will.”

“Yes, in your cold, dull way, which means you wont. Bah! I know you. Bring him back, I say, or—or— I’ve made my will, Jeffrey, but I can alter it. Yes, I’ve made my will—it’s in the little box with my initials on it—J. W. E.—in the third drawer in the iron safe at the

office. I've given all to you—all, all!—but you must take care of Ned. You must do all you can for Ned. He's my son, you know—he's your brother, Jeffrey. But I've given all to you. Here, come nearer, nearer!"

And the old man drew himself up in bed, and with an arm flung round Jeffrey's neck dragged him down.

"I must whisper—whisper, because if they should hear—"

And with his lips close to Jeffrey's ear, so close that Jeffrey's hair was blown about by the old man's breath—for his utterance, though low and hoarse, was rapid and eager—he whispered—what?

A long revelation—an important one, so it seemed; for Jeffrey, with a look of amazement, and shame, and horror on his face, would have started back more than once with some loud expression of his feelings, but that the old man's arm round his neck restrained him and held him down.

And he whispered on. Now so lowly he was hardly audible, even to Jeffrey; now more confidently, now fiercely, now whiningly, apologetically, piteously.

Jeffrey started back at length, pushing the old man from him, shaking off his grasp. He started back with staring eyes and trembling lips, and passed his hands across his eyes, as though to be sure he were really awake, and living, and doing, not in a trance, the victim of a nightmare.

"Father, you don't mean this?"

"Hush, hush! Not a word. Hush!"

And the old man put his finger to his lips.

Jeffrey suddenly wrested the key from his father's hands.

"I can't breathe here," he said, and he unlocked the door and went out. On the landing he met Mrs. Coope, the nurse. He stared suspiciously into her jet-black eyes.

"Don't lock the door, sir," she said; "I

want to go in. Sick people should never be left alone. Sick people should never be locked up. How could you think of such a thing."

"I forgot for the moment," Jeffrey answered, with some confusion.

"How is he now?"

And the jet-black eyes gazed fixedly into his face.

"He is very strange indeed—talks very oddly.

"He has frightened you?"

"He has—that is, almost. Mrs. Coope, he's mad."

"No, not mad. I know what that is: he's not mad, only he has been taking morphine to deaden those spasms of the heart. It affects his brain a little, but he's not mad."

"He has been saying some strange things—some dreadful things."

"Invalids often do."

And the jet-black eyes did not cease

their stare into his face. He was cowed by them, and turned away.

"Very likely. You must hear strange things now and then in sick rooms, Mrs. Coope."

"Yes. Sick people tell queer stories now and then."

"My father, if he's not mad—"

"No, he's not mad. Delirious he may be—a little wandering, perhaps—incoherent sometimes."

"Still, he talks at random. He's a professional man, as you know, Mrs. Coope. He may be led to say things he shouldn't."

"Who will lead him?"

"No one. I imply nothing. But he may let fall observations—true or false it matters not—who can account for a sick man's fancies?—nothing in themselves, perhaps, but which it would be dangerous to repeat."

"Who will repeat them?"

"No one, I trust—you will not, I'm sure."

He took all the sovereigns he could find in his pocket and thrust them into her hand. She made no motion save the simple closing of her fingers over the money. The expression in her face varied not in the slightest. There was no receipt written in the jet-black eyes.

"I never repeat what I hear in sick rooms—I am too used to it. Who should I tell such things to?"

"Perhaps the servants had better not go into the room—not, at any rate, while he is talking."

"They need not; I do not want their aid. I am accustomed to do all that sick people can possibly require."

Jeffrey's limbs nearly gave way under him, he trembled so as he passed down the stairs again into the dining-room. Mrs. Coope watched him, but there was no change in her face. It was like a mask—a sallow mask with black eyebrows, crowned by a tight black wig and a velvet band.

Jeffrey found Mr. Rook asleep in the arm-chair; but the noise of the door opening disturbed and finally awoke him.

"Nothing wrong, I hope—nothing gone amiss—all right, eh?"

Jeffrey, with a shaking hand, helped himself to wine. The dazed, frightened look of his face struck even Mr. Rook. Jeffrey perceived this, and sought to efface the impression of it.

"My father has had a sudden seizure of an alarming nature. He asks for Edwin, and really I hardly know where to find him."

"Can I help you—can I fetch him?"

"Have you any idea where he may be found?"

"He might be at his uncle Paul Foster's."

"True—so he might! I am obliged for your kind offer of assistance. Will you go there?—stay though—" and a recollection appeared to come to him, and he looked suspiciously at Mr. Rook.

"Or he has a friend in St. Dunstan's Inn, I've heard him say. He may have gone there."

"Seek him there—try and find him. I shall be so much obliged. Tell him to come here instantly. I'll go myself to Paul Foster's. It is very important no time should be lost. Good night."

And Jeffrey abruptly left the house. Mr. Rook, in a blundering way, discovered his hat and stick, and followed. But after he had walked a few yards down Gloucester Terrace all memory left him concerning his vague expedition to St. Dunstan's Inn in search of Edwin's friend, whose name he did not even know; and he was possessed by one sole dominant idea—how he was to get from Gloucester Terrace, Regent's Park, to Araminta Row, Pimlico.

Jeffrey set off running. Soon he met a cab.

"Drive to Jowland Street, Fitzroy Square."

"A dirty sixpennorth," moaned the driver of the vehicle. But after going a short distance the fare altered his mind. He ascertained, by searching his pockets, that certain keys were in his possession.

"Go first to Lincoln's Inn Fields," he said.

"All right! That's better."

Why did he go to Lincoln's Inn Fields? Could it be to see the will of John Whincop Erle? He stayed some time at the office of Messrs. Foskett, Bishop & Erle. From thence he drove to Jowland Street.

And now, does the reader perceive and appreciate one of the difficulties of narration? We desire to drive the team of our story's events curricule-fashion; but the nags will get ahead of each other, in a tandem sort of manner. Here are two roads running parallel to each other, and we can't be in each at the same time, describing the incidents happening in each contemporaneously. So the reader will understand that

when Mr. Jeffrey Erle arrived in Jowland Street, there occurred that interesting interview with Mistress Sylvia which we have been at some pains to chronicle in a former chapter.

"Hush! Who's making that noise?" and Mrs. Coope came out of the sick chamber on to the landing.

"Please, it's Collis taking away the dessert things," answered a small, young person, in a bonnet and shawl.

"And what do you do here, pray?"

"Please, I've been round to my aunt, in Pickard Place, Lamb's Cundick Street, and Mr. Hedwin ain't there, and ain't been there. Oh, nurse!"

"Well!"

"Where *do* you think he's got to, poor dear?"

"How should I know? Don't make all this noise. Go downstairs, do."

And poor Sally Briggs was hunted away.

"Where's Jeffrey?" asked the sick man.

"He's gone out."

"Where's Edwin?—Quick—tell me!"

"Hush! be quiet. He's not come yet, but he soon will now. Go to sleep—that's the best thing you can do."

And she removed the candles and smoothed his pillows.

"Soon will come—soon—ah!—let it be soon!"

And John Whincop Erle turned on his side, and shut his eyes.

"At last!" said Mrs. Coope. "Yes, he sleeps at last!" And her hand in her pocket sought and told over again the money she had received from Jeffrey.

CHAPTER XII.

A VISIT TO ST. DUNSTAN'S INN.

EDWIN ERLE was very busy in the garret of Mr. Newton Dax. That gentleman, blowing great clouds from his long pipe, watched his young friend's labours ; idle himself, he was yet the cause of work in the other.

"You talked at first only about earning bread, David," Mr. Dax remarked ; "it seems to me that you are going in for turtle soup. Your industry is something superb, if it is not a spirit merely, but can be maintained for anything like time. Why, you've got through a great lump of the dictionary,

and made I don't know how many drawings for the *Trumpet*."

"Do you think I have earned a holiday—a half-holiday?"

"No question of it."

"Then I intend to take one. I will call this afternoon at Paul Foster's. They have not seen me for a few days, and may be puzzling themselves to know what has become of me."

"Do they know of your having left home, and Lincoln's Inn Fields—of your coming here?"

"Probably not, unless Jeffrey may have called and informed them of my dismissal from home. But he does not call very often. At least, I think he does not."

"Better go, David, certainly. Better have gone before this."

"I waited, Goliah, because I did not wish to go to them, like a runaway school-boy, helpless and dependent, when they would have said at once—I think they

would—that I had better go back and make peace in Gloucester Terrace upon any terms—or else I should have found myself quartered upon Uncle Polly perhaps, and a load round his neck, when it is possible he carries weight enough there already. Now, thanks to you, Goliah—”

“No, don’t thank me, David.”

“Thanks to you, I’m in a way of earning a living. I like the sensation, Goliah. It seems to me a grand thing to know that the food one puts in one’s mouth is bought honestly by labour—is really and truly one’s own; and yet, I suppose, if we really love people we don’t heed much whether we get bread from them as a gift, or as a thing bought and sold. But it’s a proud thing to owe no man anything—to stand alone—enough for one’s self—wanting help from none.”

“I owe a good many men a good many things. That’s not much to be proud of, I know. But they’ll be paid some day, I

suppose—only it's so difficult to pay old debts, that ought to have gone away, according to all poetical justice, ought to have gone away for ever, like yesterday's clouds. It's very hard to be compelled to pay now, not for your present coat, nor the last, but the one before that—full price for that torn, greasy, moth-eaten old garment hanging up behind the door, past all wearing, and not worth a shilling or a pot of geraniums to sell—or for boots, patched, and leaky, and misshapen—full price—when the same money will buy bran new elegant articles, a comfort to put on, a glory to wear, a delight to contemplate! There's something wrong about the credit system. Something painful and unjust about it. I intend to make a great reformation some day, and pay ready money for everything—that is, if I can get any; and if I can get over my present little difficulties—though I'm sure I don't know how I ever shall."

Each gentleman pursued his own course

of thought. Newton Dax amid his tobacco smoke—Edwin Erle over his wood-blocks of illustrations for the *Trumpet*.

“Goliah, I’m ashamed of myself; talking of standing alone—enough for myself—wanting help from none—when I have hardly yet digested the breakfast your kindness and generosity supplied me with.”

“Go along with you.”

“I shan’t do anything of the sort. I’m a nice one to talk of independence, just pulled out of the mire and lodged on firm land by your strong arm, the mud still sticking to my feet. I’m speaking figuratively. You needn’t look at my boots. I’ve enough to remind me how much I owe to you. What a stuck-up fool I must have been to have forgotten it even for a moment!”

“Shut up!”

“I shan’t. If I talk rashly, and foolishly, and insultingly, I must make amends like other people. I have but this minute felt my feet, a mere baby patting on the

ground in an uncertain sort of way, and I must needs talk as though I had been running at a great pace all my life. I'm a fool, that's all about it, Goliah. Please forgive me. All I have, and all I may have—all I have got, and all I may get, I owe, and shall owe to you, Goliah."

"That'll do. You've made me out to be a creditor for an awful lot, and the sensation is, of course, entirely new to me—but the fact is, I've been so long used to be a debtor, that the change is almost too much for me! I'm like a prisoner come out of a dark cell into the sunshine, miserably dazzled notwithstanding his freedom, and looking lovingly back at his dungeon. I think I prefer the dusk of liability, to the glare of immunity; at any rate, for the present. You see I must be weaned from debt very gradually, not converted suddenly into a creditor. Lord! it's enough to turn a man's brain! Sudden transitions are so terribly maddening!"

"Yes, Goliah, I think the debtor sensation is the pleasantest."

"It's possible to overdo even that, however."

"I mean, of course, if one's relations with the creditor are amicable. It's but a selfish sort of pride—though pride is always selfish—that of being able to say one owes no man anything. Isn't it better to owe a man for his aid, and give him grateful and affectionate thanks for it all one's life? I think so. Love is better than pride."

"You've convinced me, David. I shall not pay my tailor—I will love him all my life instead. I will tell him so next time he comes for his bill. He'll soon give me the opportunity, I daresay; I wonder how he'd enter it in his ledger, and how it will affect his balance-sheet, and whether he'll give me a stamped receipt for the amount of his bill."

"There! I've finished that—now for my half-holiday!"

"By the way, there's a new thing coming out, in opposition to the *Trumpet*."

"Indeed! What is that?"

"The *Banjo*. Three half-pence; double the size of the *Trumpet*—double the number of illustrations."

"That will damage us, won't it?"

"No, my child. Listen, it will do us good. We'll work for both. These drawings are very good, but—That's right, look at me sharply, and contradictingly, and defiantly!"

"My dear Goliah, I'm all submission, say on."

"Well, then, the drawings are very good, but there's a prejudice against a man being too clever—against a man being master of two trades. Draw well, and the world will assume, as a matter of course, that you can't write well. Write, and they'll hold that you can't draw. You see, between two professions, each will account you an amateur. I think I must advise you to choose

one or the other, and stick to it, absolutely; at first, at all events; by-and-bye, perhaps you may make the other in a measure available. Now, I've said my say. I started you as an artist on the *Trumpet*, because that happened to be open as you entered this place. But that will go for nothing if you really incline to the other. For my part—I'm a miserable hack, I grant, but the judgment of, however humble an experience, is worth something—I think literature offers you the wider field, and that you will shine the more in it. However, we'll talk of this again, and the decision after all is for you, and my judgment and opinion on the matter may be wrong altogether. Now, good-bye. It's all right, any way, never fear. Now go to Paul Foster, and set his mind at rest. Good-bye!"

"It makes a better man of me," so Mr. Dax communed with himself, "having him here to look after, and care for. There's

something purifying and elevating about a young heart—I can't resist its influence. And then, he has *her* eyes—there's something in that. Perhaps that makes me hold to him as I do. I must make all smooth, and easy, and right for him. For myself," he added, with mournfulness, "I am past all progress, all cure, change! I went upon the reefs very early in my voyage, and have never got off again, and only keep ahead of the leak by hard working at the pumps. A shattered, broken, old hull. Yes, for I grow old, very old, my beard turns gray fast, and the crown of my head's quite bald. I shall go on no more, only keep afloat for a short time; and then settling day, and going down with a rush! But I can be of some use: stick lanterns on my yard-arms—become a signal-ship, to warn others off the rocks, and direct them on their right course. At least, let me do that for him. He should succeed—he is of the right stuff to make success out of; and yet

one blunder, and there may come an end to all. A blind, mad struggle, then, without care, hope, thought—a struggle merely because life is ours, and we cannot die.”

He smoked another pipe out, and then sat down to work.

The memory of his projected mission to St. Dunstan's Inn, lost by him on the evening of his dinner in Gloucester Terrace, recurred to Mr. Rook on the following morning. His head ached a little—not very much—because the port wine was really very excellent; and it is the bad wine that brings the established, steady, splitting headache of a morning after; and as he studied his looking-glass—he had not arrived at that period of his life when shaving was an indispensable daily occupation, perhaps at the date of our history once a week was quite as often—if, indeed, it was not rather more so—as it was necessary for him to have recourse to that operation; nevertheless, the time expended in

the examination of his chin and cheeks, with regard to his prospective chances of beard and whiskers—and I have noticed that this is constantly the case with the young non-shaver—was quite as great as would have been required for the most elaborate tonsorial labours ; and as he studied his looking-glass and his expected bristles, the thought came to him that he had not complied with Jeffrey's requisition that he should seek Edwin in St. Dunstan's Inn. It had been a hap-hazard sort of suggestion that Ned was to be found there, and Mr. Rook had really the vaguest information on the subject. Ned, in one of their many conversations, had recounted his "key-of-the-street" adventure, his meeting a friend in Covent Garden, and his reposing, on that evening, beneath that friend's roof in St. Dunstan's Inn. The story had impressed them both ; and although Mr. Rook was unaware of the unpleasant matters attending Edwin's departure from his father's

house, the possibility of his having a second time visited his hospitable acquaintance seemed to Mr. Rook a matter quite worthy of being taken into the account. But then he did not know, or had forgotten, the name of Edwin's host. So that altogether his errand did not appear to promise any very successful result.

"No matter. I shall go round there at anyrate. It will be an excuse for not being in good time at the office. And I can stop old Deacon's mouth, if he's inclined to say anything; by telling him I was out on business for Jeffrey, and with his entire sanction. That will be a blow for the old boy!"

So he dressed and breakfasted most leisurely; smoked a pipe in the garden; and had again the pleasure of seeing Miss Vane brush her hair at the window, and old Boss polish boots on the garden step, and interchange bows, and good mornings, and other friendly salutations, with those neighbours. Indeed, it was soon known in

the neighbourhood that something remarkable must have happened ; for No. 11 in the Row had not gone to town to business, but was smoking his pipe and wearing his boating hat, for all the world as though it was Sunday.

"You're not *hill*, sir, I 'ope," inquired his landlady ; but Mr. Rook relieved her mind by the assurance that he was about, very shortly, to depart for his office. And soon he strolled into town, and made his way to St. Dunstan's Inn.

"*Herle*, did you say? I don't know as I know the name."

Mr. Rook was making inquiries of the beadle, or gate-keeper, of the Inn—a thin, limp man, with moist, suspicious-looking eyes, one of which had a way of acting with extreme independence and disregard of the movements of its companion, straying into corners, and threatening now to ascend into the head, now to disappear behind the cheek, of the beadle its owner—the while

exhibiting an extent of inflamed white, which was, though curious, painful. He had a way, too, of thrusting his tongue into his cheek, and then scratching angrily the protuberance thus occasioned. This was especially his manner when he devoted himself to thought or inquiry. He looked scrutinizingly at Septimus.

“Was he a *holdish* man, now, with grey 'air, and spectacles? What like was he?”

Of course it was quite incompatible with his beadle, gate-keeping nature, to say what would have been the precise truth—that he had never heard of the name, and much less was acquainted with its proprietor. This was too much to expect of him. While it must be explained that the “oldish man with the grey locks and spectacles” was entirely mythical, and was merely resorted to with a view to prolong inquiry, and to obtain credit for the information he did not really possess. In reply to any inquiry for a tenant of St. Dunstan's Inn, he would in-

variably go through the formula of asking was the person sought "a holdish man," &c. ; and if the inquirer had ever admitted that the person inquired for did answer to the description given, it would have astonished no one more than the gatekeeper, who had no one to give up, to point at or direct to, in any way corresponding with that creature of his imagination.

"Here—ask this lady. Perhaps she may know."

The lady was short and stout, with no apparent neck, a bruised bonnet, a green merino dress, a basket on her substantial arm, and a key pendant from one of the short fingers of her red hand.

"Erle?" she answered, in reply to Mr. Rook's inquiry; and then she added, while she examined him carefully with her sharp, bird's eyes, "I fancy I have 'eard the name—and supposing I might happen to know where he is to be found, what might you happen to want with him?"

It may be noted, as a characteristic of St. Dunstan's Inn, that, like a small state surrounded by powerful and predatory neighbours, it always viewed the approach of a stranger with eyes of inquiry and suspicion, if not of antagonism.

Mr. Rook had been so fortunate as to address himself to one of the only two people in the Inn who knew anything about Mr. Edwin Erle. Mr. Rook and the lady interchanged glances, and somehow friendly relations seemed in that way to be established between them.

"Is your name Mrs. Giles?" he asked, with a smile.

"Bless us! he knows me! And who may I have pleasure of aspeaking to; who's got, oh, ever so much, the advantage of me?" and Mrs. Giles held up the key to her eye after the manner of a glass, and through it surveyed Mr. Rook.

"I've heard of you, you see. I'm a friend,

I am. It's all right with me, though I haven't got the countersign."

"Well, my Trojan," said Mrs. Giles, "I think I can trust you—and we ain't so frightened now as we once was—at least Newton isn't. Up those stairs to the top. Kick at the door if it's shut, and shout your name through the letter slit." She watched Mr. Rook's retreating form. "No. I'd take my dying dick he hasn't got a writ in his pocket, or he couldn't move along so easy as that."

Mr. Rook knocked at the door on the top of the stairs, with the name Smith over it.

"Who's there?" a voice shouted.

"Ned, it's me ; open the door!" Mr. Rook shouted back through the letter slit.

After a rather prolonged pause the door was opened by Mr. Dax. He started back with some suspicion and alarm.

"Now, then—what is it?—what do you want?—who are you?" Mr. Dax rapidly inquired.

"I want Mr. Edwin Erle."

"All right," said Mr. Dax. "Fire away! What do you want?—I'm he!"

Mr. Rook stared at him, and then laughed loudly.

"Well that's a good one! I remember you now. We met you coming out of the Nonpareil; but I did not know you were 'the key of the street' man—at least I did not recollect then—thinking of something else, I suppose."

"Dear me," said Mr. Dax, "I have some hazy notion of it. Then it's all right. If I did not think it was a fellow with a writ!"

"All right. I am a lawyer's clerk, you know."

"You are? Then my suspicions were justified."

"So's Edwin—you know."

"Oh! But he hasn't the heart to serve a writ; no—nor to write a lawyer's letter—and he never will have; and I hope you won't have, either."

"I don't know about that. But I must see Edwin."

"You can't. He's just gone out."

"Unlucky! The fact is—he's wanted in Gloucester Terrace—his father's ill—very bad indeed, so I'm told."

"He's gone to his uncle's."

"Paul Foster's? Then he'll hear of it there."

"Come and have a pipe."

Soon Mr. Rook was smoking and prattling in Mr. Dax's room in St. Dunstan's Inn.

"Youth!—youth!" quoth Mr. Dax; "priceless treasure, which we grind to powder or fling away, without prizing or even understanding! What would I give to be young again! To live the past over once more? No—not that—but to live a better life! That would be something."

CHAPTER XIII.

A DISCLOSURE.

FROM Paul Foster Edwin Erle learnt of the dangerous illness of his father, and at once hastened to Gloucester Terrace. He forgot all his unhappiness—all the wrong that had been done him—all his resolutions never again to set foot in the paternal house. The old man his father was dying—had desired to see him—was not that enough? Before the grave that now seemed opening how could he remember the quarrels, and the insults, and the errors, that had kept them apart—how small and pitiful these seemed now, before the greatness, and

the majesty, and the awfulness of death ! Yes, it was death ! There was no mistaking it. He could read it in the white faces of the servants, the stillness, the numbness of panic that seemed to have fallen upon the whole household. He could see it in Dr. Turner's calm, serious looks. No cheerfulness now—no merry anecdotes for the amusement of the invalid—no light conversation to brighten up the gloom of the sick chamber ; but the steady, solemn manner of a man aware that he is struggling against too powerful a foe—conscious that he has now little to do but to wait until the final blow falls, and the end comes—that he is beaten in this quarter, and must so hasten elsewhere, to engage the enemy in other directions. And Gloucester Terrace was strewn with straw, to deaden the noise of the few vehicles that ever rumbled past ; and the knocker was bandaged up with black kid. A presentiment of coming woe seemed to possess, and hang over, and cloud

the whole house, and in the dread of the approaching mystery the ordinary duties of life seemed to be suspended and pretermitted. The door-steps had not been whitened; the blinds hung crooked in the windows; even the scarlet-runners in the area had not been watered; and there were no orders for the trades-people. Discipline was lost; bells were rung and not answered; the routine of meals was broken up; the servants huddled together, shivering and whispering; all thoughts centred in the back drawing-room, where old Mr. Erle lay dying.

A few hours brought about this great change—routed ease, and tidiness, and comfort—and substituted this dreadful suspense, and suspicion, and distress. There had been a consultation of physicians in the morning. Dr. Turner had expressed a desire that other advice should be called in. Three doctors' carriages had been parading for half an hour the straw-strewn terrace.

The doctors met in the front drawing-room, and talked solemnly in one of the windows; they had talked with Jeffrey; they saw the patient in his presence; they saw the patient in his absence; they examined Mrs. Coope, the nurse; they returned again to the front drawing-room, and talked again solemnly in another of the windows. They agreed upon a prescription. They again saw Jeffrey; they each received the neat paper packet that contained the fee, and they approved everything that had been done. They had examined the prescriptions of Dr. Turner, and were quite of opinion that nothing better could possibly have been done. Their poor friend was in excellent hands; he had the benefit of the most admirable advice; all that medical skill could do had been done. They saw nothing to alter; no error to regret. They cordially approved of Dr. Turner's treatment; nothing could have been more judicious. And *hope?*—Was there any hope? Well, it was

hard, indeed, to say. They would rather not—much rather not give an opinion. It would be better to be prepared for the worst. It would be better to caution the sufferer—it must be done, however, very carefully and discreetly—that he was in a position of much danger; that it was possible he might not recover; that if he had any arrangements to make, it was very advisable that they should not be longer postponed. No!—they would not say that there was absolutely no hope. The patient had had a fine constitution—a remarkably fine constitution; though it had been tried—considerably tried. “How old was he?” “Seventy!—not more?” The fact was, that the symptoms about the heart were bad—very bad. The prescription was very simple—a sedative—nothing more. They would hope for the best. A good constitution would sometimes pull through a great deal—more, much more than people gene-

rally supposed. The consultation was over. The doctors took their departure.

"Yes, it is death!" said Jeffrey Erle, as they rode away to other sick chambers, other consultations, more guineas, and dying scenes; "that is what they mean, though they will not speak out. It is death! They know it—I know it!"

He looked very scared and worn. He had not been to bed all night. He was untidy, crumpled, unshaven; he had lost all his old neatness, and care, and strict propriety of appearance. His hair fell over his forehead, his eyes were wild and feverish, and his lips parched, and cracked, and bleeding where he had bitten them. He had sat up all night in the dining-room, going upstairs now and then to inquire after the sick man. Mrs. Coope, however, had forbidden his entrance on each occasion. She told him that the patient slept, or that Jeffrey's appearance only disturbed and irritated him. Early in the morning

Jeffrey had left the house for a breath of fresh air. He had walked about in the park abstractedly, not knowing nor caring which way he turned. Now he set off running at his utmost speed—now he suddenly stopped and stood for a long time quite motionless. Then he went back to the house and ordered breakfast, but it was removed untasted, his appetite was quite gone.

“Jeffrey, you look very pale—very ill.”

“I’m glad you’ve come, Edwin. I hope you have not hesitated? — have not thought—”

“No, Jeffrey, the past is nothing now. I came directly I knew of his illness and of his desire to see me. How is he now? But *you* look very bad, Jeffrey. Have you been sitting up?”

“Hush! I want to speak to you. Come in here.”

Jeffrey took his brother into the dining-room, closing the door after him carefully.

"Before you go upstairs, Edwin, it is necessary that I should tell you—that I should caution you—" And he stopped.

"What is the matter, Jeffrey?"

"You must prepare yourself for a great change in him. I must warn you of that. He is no longer like the same person."

"What do you mean? Why do you look so strangely? Don't turn away, man—tell me all."

"He is sometimes—very often—not himself. To relieve the acute pain in his chest he has been taking some very powerful medicine: I think it has affected his brain."

"Heavens! Jeffrey, do you mean that he is mad?"

"No, not mad. But sometimes he does not know what he is saying; he is possessed by the strangest fancies; imagining that what are the idlest dreams are the real, actual truth; that the most impossible things have happened. He confuses the

real and unreal in a way that would perhaps alarm you if you had received no previous notice of his infirmity."

"I understand. May I see him now, at once?"

"You must be very careful not to irritate or alarm him. The least excitement may bring on again those spasms of the heart. Another attack, and no one can answer for his life for a moment."

"I will take care."

"Humour him. Listen to him. Talk of general subjects. Let him talk as little as possible."

"I understand."

"Don't contradict him, and, above all, don't question him."

"May I go up now?"

"And don't attach too much weight to what he may say. Receive all without interest, without alarm, as a sick man's fancies, utterly untrue and unreal."

"Yes, yes."

"I will ask Mrs. Coope, the nurse, if you may go in now." And Jeffrey left the room.

Edwin walked impatiently up and down the gloomy parlour. Soon Jeffrey returned, Their father had been asleep, but was awake, calm and refreshed. Edwin might enter the sick chamber."

"You will remember what I have told you." Jeffrey again cautioned him. "Stay, I will go in with you."

The old man was propped up by pillows. His breathing was easier so, than in a recumbent position. He looked very small, he was so wasted by illness; and his eyes seemed unnaturally large and staring, his cheeks had fallen in so. Mrs. Coope had been "smartening him up a bit," as she termed it. She had combed smooth his long, thin, white hair, she had draped the chintz dressing-gown carefully round his shoulders. He had endured all her attentions with an apathetic feebleness. Once only he had

been aroused to an angry consciousness, when she had attempted to take from him his red silk handkerchief. Babette reposed on the bed, within reach of the old man's hand. But he was almost too weak now, or too listless, to stretch forth and smooth her soft white fur.

"See who's come to pay you a visit," said Mrs. Coope, with an artificial cheerfulness.

The old man merely glanced at her, he said nothing.

"Your son, Edwin—Mr. Edwin; don't you know him?"

"How are you to-day, father?" and Edwin took one of the wasted, weak, yellow hands in his. The old man looked at him earnestly, almost angrily.

"Who?" he said, faintly. "Nurse, quick!—quick! Who?"

"Don't you know? Oh, you *must* know. Your youngest son!—he's come to see how you're getting on."

"Who?" he asked again, still staring into his son's face.

"You know me, father, don't you?" Edwin urged in a moved voice. "Edwin—I am Edwin!"

"Edwin!" he echoed, in a weak, hollow voice. "No! I remember *Gabrielle*!—yes, *Gabrielle*!" and he closed his eyes.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Coope, "is he going to sleep?" But the old man commenced to pat Edwin's hands in a feeble, mindless way.

"Yes," he muttered, hardly audible, "*Gabrielle*! poor *Gabrielle*!" Then he reopened his eyes, and, raising his hand, smoothed his son's hair, while a softer expression stole over his face, and tears stood in his eyes.

"Her hair, yes—her hair—light, silken, but not so long—not so long; and her mouth, just—yes, and her eyes. She looked like that—just like that!" Then, with a shrill cry of discovery, "Yes!—yes! So—so it is! Ah!

Ned!—Ned! my boy—my boy!” And he drew him nearer, and the tears streamed from the old man’s eyes, as he leant his head upon his son’s shoulder.

Suddenly he turned round, seizing the nurse’s arm with violence.

“Who’s that? Tell me, there—there!—tell me!”

“Hush! hush! be quiet! don’t behave like that, I can’t allow it. You’re hurting my arm. There is no one here—only your sons—your sons and me.”

“That man in black, with the white face?”

“Where? There’s no man in black. Oh, there? Why, that’s your son. Your eldest son, Mr. Jeffrey—you know him, surely?” Jeffrey came nearer to the bed.

“Go, go away! Don’t let him touch me, nurse, take him away! Not you! not you!” he said to Ned; “keep hold of my hand. Yes, like that; and your arm round me. Yes, like that, keep so, don’t move.

Nurse, why doesn't he go? His white face frightens me! Give me—give me something to throw at him!”

(“You'd better go,” said Mrs Coope to Jeffrey, who seemed reluctant to quit the bedside; “stay in the next room if you like. He'll be better soon, and I'll let you know when you can come back.” Jeffrey left the room with a meaning glance at Edwin.)

“Has he gone?—has he gone?” asked the old man. “Are you sure? No! no! it's a lie! You're cheating me! If—if I could get hold of that woman, Ned, I'd kill her! He's in the room somewhere still! I know he is! There! there! lift up that curtain—quick! Up with it—ah! well—well! I suppose he's gone. I am thirsty—beastly thirsty!—give me some drink! No, an orange—give me an orange. Woman! don't tear the peel like that, you fool! Take it from her, you—you, I forget your name. Ah! Ned!—Ned! so it is, you're right. I can't eat it, squeeze the

juice into a wine-glass. Ugh! how sour it is! There, there, take it away. Give me some grapes. and hold your tongues, both of you. Ah, Ned, my boy, this is what it is to be a sick man—a poor old sick man! Lord! how like you are to Gabrielle!”

A violent fit of coughing came on, and he was bent nearly double on the bed, with the force, and the pain of it. After that his breathing was very short for some time; panting, and gasping, unable to speak, and unconscious apparently of what was happening, he was supported in the arms of his son. Soon he rallied a little, and held the red silk handkerchief to his lips; then he made a painful effort to stretch forward, and reach Babette; failing this, he fell again to patting his son's hand, and gazing with a vacant pleasure into his face.

“Yes,” he said; “poor Gabrielle lay dead in the room upstairs—stone-dead in her coffin—all in white, with lace round her face and on her neck; stone-dead, but still

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see—what was it? Lord! how you fired up! What was it? Ah—yes—that was it—about Désirée—Désirée Barielle. She married Paul Foster, the painter. It was Gabrielle I married.”

“Yes, yes, father, I know; don’t speak more of that.”

“Yes, I talked of Désirée, and you quarrelled with me. You were mad. No, no. I was not. I said truth—all truth. I swear it! What was it? Yes, she was false to him—a false wife, Edwin. Yes, that’s it—let me keep to that. Désirée was false to Paul Foster. Don’t hold my hand so tight! I’ll tell you all—all! Where’s my handkerchief. Quick!”

In vain Edwin strove to turn him from the subject. The sick man was thoroughly possessed by it, and would go on.

“She’s dead now. Quite as well, perhaps, quite, for Paul’s sake—for his child’s. A wretched marriage. It would make you laugh to see how poor they were. So Paul

took pupils. What a fool he was! So confident—so grand—and oh, so poor! And the pupils—one of them learnt drawing, painting—what d'ye call it?—of the husband, and love—yes, love—of the wife!”

“Father, don't tell me this; don't—”

“Hush! Be still, and no one will hear—no one know, only you and me. They think it's all forgotten. I remember, though. Yes; a pupil—a mere boy—a raw-boned boy—Jack Newton.”

“Newton!”

“Yes, that was his name. He took the name of Dax afterwards.”

“Newton Dax!”

“Ah! that's he. You've got the name pat there. Newton Dax. He took the name of Dax—royal letters, and that—and a fortune with it. Oh! yes; it was worth his while. His aunt died—his great-aunt I think she was—old Lady Dax, widow of the Indian Judge in Warren Hastings' time. Oh! they made fortunes then in India. So

this Jack Newton came in for all—a fortune. But that wasn't till afterwards. Paul found him out—wretched, raw-boned boy, what could Désirée see in him?—and drove him away like a dog! He was mad—they were both mad! And Jack Newton—what did he do? He came in for the money. But what does a beggar do on horseback, my dear? He rode to the devil! Such a pace!—such a pace!”

“But, father,” cried Ned, in an agonised voice, “this is not true!”

“Quite true—every word of it. I know—I know all about—who should know better? I was the husband of Gabrielle.”

“And Désirée?”

“She cried! Oh! how she cried! And fainted! She was very frail and delicate. So was Gabrielle. Yes; so was Gabrielle. And Paul forgave her, and took her back; and so she sank, and fell ill, and died. Lord! how pale the boy is!—how your hand shivers! Speak! speak!—say something!”

"Newton Dax!" The words fell mechanically from Edwin's trembling lips.

"Quite right—you remember well—that was his name. Give me some more grapes."

"Oh! father, if this should be really true!" And Edwin hid his face on his father's pillow.

Then Mrs. Coope entered the room.

"You had better go, sir, now, or you'll tire him. He has been talking too much—oh! a great deal too much! Perhaps he will be able to get a little sleep now; it will do him good—and he must take the medicine the doctor's ordered for him."

CHAPTER XIV.

BABETTE.

JEFFREY met Edwin coming out of the sick-chamber. He drew him into the adjoining drawing-room.

"Well," said Jeffrey, looking earnestly into his brother's face; "he has been talking strangely, has he not? What has he been saying?"

"Oh, Jeffrey!" And Ned was painfully agitated.

"I cautioned you, remember; I told you that he wandered a good deal—talked at random—a lot of fanciful rubbish."

"Do you think so, Jeffrey? Are you sure?"

"Yes, yes—no doubt of it. What did he say?"

"Oh! if I could but think that he was light-headed—that it was his illness made him talk like that—not the plain, dreadful truth."

"But you don't tell me, Ned. What did he say? I listened at the folding-doors—"

"Listened, Jeffrey?"

"But he spoke so low I could make nothing out of it."

"Why did you listen? What was it to you what he might say to me? Jeffrey, it was very mean of you to listen."

Jeffrey turned away biting his lips.

After a pause, he came back to his brother, saying tremulously,

"Don't say that of me, Ned. I'm so weak and broken by this dreadful illness, my nerves are so unstrung, I hardly know what I say or do. I have had no sleep. I

have tasted nothing, for I don't know how many hours. My father's state has quite possessed me—at a time of all others when I have need of self-command—of all my energies. In such a great trouble as this I should not be judged by ordinary rules."

"I'm sorry to have pained you, Jeffrey. I can understand what you feel. My father spoke of—"

"Well, well, speak out."

"Of Désirée, Paul Foster's wife—Sylvia's mother."

"Oh, was that all? What did he say of her?"

"Perhaps you have heard the story—if, indeed, it be not as you have hinted, all the rambling of a sick man's fancy. But no—it is not that—I feel it is not. It's all true. He said that she was false, with one, Newton Dax," and Ned stopped, his eyes filled with tears.

"He said nothing—of his will?" asked

Jeffrey—"of his property—how it was left, or anything?"

There was an anxiety about Jeffrey's manner that could not fail to strike his brother.

"Not one word. Surely, Jeffrey, there will be time to think of this presently. Surely we have enough to think about now."

"Yes, but—"

"What matters about his will, or his property? What are these things to us? Why should we be contemplating and considering what may happen after his death, when he still lives—when we should be praying for his life."

Jeffrey looked steadily at his brother, and then said calmly,

"Perhaps you don't quite understand these things, Edwin. Perhaps you misinterpret my meaning. My father has been speaking to me on the subject. He has been discussing the terms of his will. The

doctors have, I am pained to say, given their opinion that any arrangement of that nature which he may desire, or which it may be necessary for him to make, should not be longer delayed. The disposition of his property has been under his consideration. I gather from him—not with any certainty, for his intellect is in a sad state—but I am led to believe that he has constituted me sole executor, and sole legatee of his estate. But, of course, I should charge myself with your interests. Any wish you may entertain it shall be my study—”

“For heaven’s sake, Jeffrey, don’t talk in this way! It will be time enough by-and-bye. Heaven grant it may be long distant! Let us hope for his recovery, not calculate upon his death.”

And Ned quitted the room. Jeffrey flung himself into a chair, lost in thought.

Later in the day there was an attempt at dinner, and the brothers met in the parlour.

It was a sad, silent repast, if repast it could be called, for they ate little or nothing, and the dishes were carried away much in the same state as they were brought in. They drank two or three glasses of wine, and with nervous, feverish hands crumbled their bread. Their eyes seldom met, for they were both gazing with rigid abstraction on the various objects before them on the tablecloth. They had made inquiries two or three times of the nurse. The patient was in much the same state. The sedative had had some good effect ; he dozed now and then, with intervals of restlessness, and irritation, and pain. The clergyman of the district had been with him, and had made an attempt to read to him ; but the old man seemed pre-occupied with his red handkerchief and his white cat, and at length grew uneasy and excited, and it became necessary to suspend the reading. He grew weaker, it seemed ; he swallowed now with difficulty, and the nurse was obliged to feed him like a child,

for he could scarcely lift his hand to his head, or he would not trouble himself to do so. He talked to himself a good deal, now and then calling by name for his youngest son and his second wife. Never, so the nurse said, for his first wife or his eldest son.

The brothers had not spoken a word since the dinner had been removed. In the endeavour to impart some little comfort to the dismal dining-room, now more dismal than ever, the housekeeper had taken upon herself to have a fire lighted—and indeed the night was sufficiently chilly to warrant such a proceeding. Speechless the brothers sat over the fire; each now and then rising to walk up and down the room a few times, and then resume his seat.

“How dreadful this is!” exclaimed Edwin at last, in a voice of suffering; “it seems like waiting for death!”

But Jeffrey never spoke. He leant forward in his chair, supporting his chin with

his hands, and gazing fiercely into the fire.

"How old Jeffrey looks!" Ned thought, looking at him accidentally, and as though struck by a sudden discovery; "and there are lines of grey in his hair. I never noticed that before."

There was a ring at the bell. Collis brought in a note for Edwin. The bearer was waiting for an answer. It was from Sylvia. A few lines expressive of her sympathy for his sorrow, and of inquiry as to the health of Mr. Erle. Edwin left the note upon the table, and went out into the hall to give an oral answer to the bearer of it. As the door closed upon him Jeffrey seized the note and read it eagerly.

"No!" he said, with an air of bitter disappointment when he had concluded it. "Not a line for me!—not a word!—not a thought! Is my sorrow, then, worth no sympathy? Must she give all to him—nothing to me? What a fool I have been—am—to care for

her!" And he crumpled up the letter in a rage, and thrust it into his pocket.

It was Paul Foster who had brought Sylvia's note. Edwin took him into the study.

"My dear uncle Polly, I'm so glad to see you!"

"How is he?" asked Paul in a stealthy whisper; indeed his anxiety not to be overheard, and to intrude, or to disturb, was, perhaps, a trifle overdone, and imparted something of a melodramatic tone to his manner—though his feeling in the matter was thoroughly genuine. "Is he any better? Is there any hope? Syl desired me to come and see you, if possible. Hush! Am I making too much noise? How is Jeffrey?"

"Syl is very kind," said Ned shaking his uncle's hand, "most kind. So are you, Polly, most kind and affectionate. He is, perhaps, a trifle better. It is indeed hard to give any answer about him. He is so weak—so pitiable to look at; and his

mind—" and Edwin's thoughts recurred to the old man's story told in the room above. And was it true? And could it be true?—and he looked into Paul's face. An old face, with much fat upon and beneath it—no romance in it now. A face that could wax jovial over tumblers, and even sing comic songs with burthens of strange prolongment—a face that might look even merry and happy. Yet a battered face, too—with ruts in the forehead and creases about the lips. Yes—a face that might have known much suffering too, and tears, and anguish—though age had come to it, and fat, and some forgetfulness, and a veneer of joviality. Ned looked into Paul's face and saw there no contradiction—perhaps, rather confirmation of the dreadful story told in the room overhead.

"And Jeffrey?" further questioned Paul, still stealthily, "he bears up, I hope? Ah! it is a great trial for all. But Jeffrey has strong nerves—and a stout will; a man of

the world—a lawyer—who has made wills at sick-bed sides, and been to funerals—”

“Polly, don’t talk of such things!” said Edwin, with some anger.

“I mean”—and Paul gesticulated—“that he is less prone to susceptibility than we are whose sensibilities are always on the *qui-vive*—who are liable to attacks upon our sentiments. Yes, I hope he bears up bravely in this hour of trial. It will aid you so much, Ned, if he can do so. By the way—has your father made a will, Ned? Do you happen to know what disposition he has made of his property?”

“No, indeed I do not; and what’s more—”

“You don’t care—no—of course you do not—very right, and proper; still at a time like this—”

“You can see Jeffrey if you like,” said Edwin; “he may be able to inform you, if you are anxious on the subject.”

“Anxious! My dear Ned, how can

you talk so? I anxious? Thank you. I won't disturb Jeffrey—not at such a time as this!—he must have so much upon his mind! Good night, my dear Ned, good night. By the way, Syl sends her love to you.”

“Dear Syl! Give her mine in return.”

“Yes, to you—and to Jeffrey. Will you tell him? Good night.”

“Yes,” muttered Uncle Paul, as he returned from Gloucester Terrace to Jowland Street, “Jeffrey will be the head of the firm of Foskett, Bishop, & Erle—no doubt of that. A good match! Ah, yes! a good match!”

Later in the evening Dr. Turner called. The brothers welcomed him, as though he brought hope, and health, and life.

“I said I would come round the last thing at night. I'll go upstairs at once. No, don't you come. I shall find Mrs. Coope in the room, I've no doubt.”

He was a calm man, with a sedate,

kindly manner, and soft white hands, and long fingers, on which glittered two mourning rings; he wore a white neckcloth and a long black frock cloth coat, and looked rather like a clergyman. His forehead was high, and bald, and polished, and his features were handsome, although altogether he was very pale and attenuated.

He came down shortly.

"He is better, I think," said Jeffrey; "I hope you find him so?"

But Dr. Turner did not look very hopeful. Mrs. Coope had accompanied him downstairs, and he was giving her some final instructions.

"He is more composed," he said, turning to Jeffrey, "but I fear he is weaker—much weaker."

"Did he ramble at all?"

"No, that's over—he is quite himself; he knew me—pressed my hand—but he is dreadfully weak; still, a good night's rest may do wonders. Mr. Jeffrey, your hand

is very feverish. You are allowing this to prey upon you. You must take care of yourself, or we shall have you on the sick list. I think you had better let me write a prescription for you—a simple little draught, to be taken before going to bed, to quiet your nerves a little and get rid of this fever; for you must husband your strength, you will perhaps have need of it. Stay!—what's that noise? There's something moving about upstairs—trying the door-handle!”

The noise was audible to all of them: a movement subdued but sudden—a feeble turning of the door-handle of the sick man's room. They all hurried upstairs. Half-way up they could hear a strange wailing sound.

“What can that be?”

“Why, it's Babette!”

They entered Mr. Erle's chamber as Babette sprung from the door. She commenced to leap about the room in a strange

disturbed, scared manner, mewing and crying the while piteously; and there were stains upon her fur.

The old man was sitting up in bed, ghastly white, while the blood was streaming from his mouth, down the chintz dressing-gown, on to the white sheets: it had sullied the white coat of Babette. A very solemn look came over the doctor's face.

Mr. Erle never spoke again—he gasped for breath painfully, but the blood filled his mouth and choked his utterance, and he sunk back exhausted with the effort. He was perfectly sensible. You could see by his eyes that he recognized all in the room—a strange loving look towards Edwin, one of piteous appeal to Jeffrey; then a glance at Edwin, and a feeble, futile effort to reach his hand. Then he fell back in his bed.

Dr. Turner took the thin yellow hand in his, feeling for the pulse. He placed his other hand upon the old man's heart. He turned to the scared faces lean-

ing over the bed—Jeffrey's, pale, frowning, with compressed bitten lips, yet composed; Edwin's, ashy white, almost to fainting, with burning parched lips. He looked to the nurse.

"Take him away," the doctor said.

She understood what he meant. She took Edwin's hand—he made no resistance—he was like one in a dream, or under the influence of somnambulism. She led him from the sick-chamber into the front drawing-room, pressing his hand and gazing upon him with her jet-black eyes, calmly yet kindly.

There was a sad intelligence in the doctor's eyes as he removed his hand from the old man's heart. He looked at Jeffrey, who knew what the look meant.

And they drew the sheet over the dead man's face.

Babette leapt upon the bed, only to give a wild sad cry, then leap down and dart hurriedly through the open door from the

room. The doctor shook Jeffrey's hand.

"Be kind to the poor boy in the next room. He has no father now."

And Dr. Turner's task was over in Gloucester Terrace.

And the shadow of the wings of God's Angel of Death oppressed the house, and grief swayed the brothers' hearts, and they moved about as though drugged and stupefied by a great anguish.

John Wincop Erle lay dead, with the sheet drawn over his worn, waxen face. Consecrated by death, he looked now younger and handsomer than he had looked for a long, long time.

CHAPTER XV.

KENSAL GREEN.

It appeared in the newspapers:—

“On the — inst., at his residence in Gloucester Terrace, Regent’s Park, John Whincop Erle, Esquire, of the firm of Messrs. Foskett, Bishop, & Erle, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and formerly of Crewcroft Chase, in the county of Cheshire, aged 70. R. I. P.”

And in addition to this advertised notice, there were even short paragraphs, setting forth the event, and alluding to the dead

man as an eminent solicitor, who had been for many years the confidential agent and adviser of the Duke of Blankshire—who had been concerned in the Earl of Dashmore's celebrated case, on the occasion of that nobleman's trial by his peers—whose extensive electioneering knowledge and skill had played so important a part in the return of the first parliament, after the Reform Bill—who had given such admirable evidence before the commission appointed to inquire into the laws of conveyancing, and real property, and had, thereon, been complimented in the report of the commission—who had even been consulted by the government of the day, when those important alterations were made, with which we are all acquainted, in the law of process and arrest for debt. He was stated to have died deeply lamented, and that the profession, of which he was so chief an ornament, had now experienced a great loss indeed; that there was now a gap in the legal ranks not

readily to be filled—and so on. Certainly it seemed he was a man of mark as a lawyer, this John Whincop Erle, deceased. And the shutters were closed at the office in Lincoln's Inn Fields; and in fact there was rather a cessation of work amongst the clerks of the establishment, including Mr. Rook; a sort of dismal, darkened holiday prevailing, until after the funeral.

A simple funeral. So the undertaker had been instructed. He was the only man who dared to say nothing of his grief, though it is possible he too might have had his own regrets on the subject. He had known the dead man for many years, and had constantly worked for him and the family. He was an upholsterer and carpenter, in addition to his other more melancholy pursuits. But he held his peace; who would believe anything about an undertaker's sorrow for a death? Yes, and would they have silver handles? or plated, or bronze, or merely japan? And a plate? Yes—with any in-

scription? Yes—full christian names? And the age? Yes. And then he drew from his pocket a jointed two-foot rule, and measured the length of the body. How solemn it looked, shrouded by the sheet, moulding it to its own form and outline. He measured the length first mechanically, tapping his fingers with the rule afterwards—and then in a more business-like fashion, again; noting down particulars in his pocket-book. Yes, it should all be done very nicely; he would take every care—he would see to everything himself—he would be sure to. And so *that* was over.

What a gloom hung over the whole household, and occupied and ruled them all! How the dead body in the back drawing-room, from beneath its shroud, seemed still to awe and command! The servants passed the door with a shrinking haste at night, as they went upstairs to bed, and told each other ghostly stories of illnesses, and deaths, resurrections, and ghosts, until they were

nearly sick, and screaming from terror. And all spoke with hushed voices, and trod with as noiseless steps as possible; and people at the street door were answered in whispers, and besought to make no stir. It was as though the dead man still had hearing, and would cry out, and scold, and swear, at their disturbing him. There were people at the street door all day. Some not knowing of the death, to inquire after the invalid, and leave cards; others knowing of the death, to inquire after the survivors, and leave cards; the young person from the mourning establishment to receive instructions from Mrs. Beaver, as to the black dresses for herself and servants; the tailor about the mourning for the sons; Mr. Deacon from Lincoln's Inn Fields, looking very white, and solemn, to consult with Jeffrey—for business must be attended to; and the undertaker's men incessantly in and out. They brought the coffin by night, as quietly as possible; but their boots *would* creak,

and they couldn't help staggering a little, and bumping now against the wall, now against the balusters, as they carried it up. "You see there was such a awkward turn in the stairs just there." "And how ill Mr. Jeffrey do look, to be sure," they said in the kitchen. "And so I'm sure do Mr Hedwin," said a certain person. "There! there! there's no need for you to be putting your spoke in at such a time as this, bothering about that boy, with your great ugly voice. You get on with your work, and don't make a noise, and go and clean yourself—go." And then there was wondering what would Jeffrey do—and would he keep up the house, and marry, and so things go on just as before, only better? or would he give up the house, and should they have to inquire for new situations?—and what did they think the old gentleman was worth? A good bit of property, they supposed; and would it be equally divided between his sons? No, of course not, it wasn't to be supposed that

that boy would receive as much as Jeffrey. Absurd ! And was it likely there would be any remembrances, or anything of that sort for the servants, as of course there ought to be ?

Oh ! that weary week intervening between the death and the funeral. Jeffrey, in the darkened parlour, his white face bending over the black-edged paper, writing letters. Edwin moving about the house like a ghost. He had heard again from Sylvia. She had written to him a few lines, full of sympathy, and kindness, and consolation.

"Be sure, dear Edwin," she wrote, "I feel most heartily for all your sorrows; and I wish that anything I could say or do could tend in any way to their lightening. Pray, don't deem me to be intruding upon your grief. In the great affliction that has fallen upon you I cannot be silent; absent from you, I cannot refrain from writing to you. Dear cousin, when may I see you?—when will

you come to me once more? Pray, do not long be absent from me. Come round in the evening—there shall be no one here, only Polly and myself—you shall not be pained, or distressed, or disturbed by anything we may do or say. We will do all we can to comfort and console you.” And he had gone round to see her—for, indeed, it was not possible to resist her appeal; and her words, and affectionate glances from eyes brimming with tears, seemed to pour some consolation into his shocked and aching heart. “How good and kind you are to me, Syl,” he said, in an altered voice; and she was nearly starting up from her tears to tell him how whole, and true, and ceaseless was her love for him; but could he fail to see that?—She only clung to him the tighter, and kissed him with a pure and hallowing affection; and Paul seemed to feel that such scenes were not for him to contemplate—were something too holy for his unseemly presence; and with much

sorrow in his heart, and moved, and troubled, and humbled, the old painter went out of the house, and left the children to their grief, their tears, and their affection.

"Where have you been, Edwin?" asked Jeffrey.

"To Paul Foster's."

"How could you go there?"

"Sylvia wrote to me."

"Indeed! Have you no thought for what has happened? Do you so soon forget *his* wishes? For shame!"

Even their common sorrow had not completely bridged the gulf between the brothers. Or was there one subject on which it was not possible that they could think accordantly, and that—Sylvia Foster?

On the day of the melancholy ceremony many of the surrounding eminent firms in Lincoln's Inn Fields closed their shutters, as a sign of homage to their departed professional brother; and several of the houses in Gloucester Terrace had their windows

shrouded with blinds, or screened by shutters, from respect to the dead neighbour. A quiet funeral—only one mourning coach, with the two sons of the dead man, and his regular medical attendant. He had expressed a wish—so people said—that the funeral should be of as simple a nature as was possible. He was not an ostentatious man, they said, though he was so intimately connected with the aristocratic families—a man of quiet manners, and frugal tastes, and homely pursuits—a nice, clean, kind-looking, sweet-mannered old gentleman—so they whispered in the neighbourhood. But still it seemed not possible that his wishes should be regarded in their absolute integrity. People would pay homage to his funeral car. Respect was forced upon the mourners. Gloucester Terrace was crowded with the carriages of the nobility and gentry, clients of the dead man, sent to join the *cortège* and swell its mournful triumph. The superb vehicle of the Duke of Blank-

shire—as much like a bran new hackney coach as it could be, with its scarlet wheels and orange body, and tremendous coats of arms and ducal coronets crowded on its every panel; brilliant silver-decorated harness on the glossy, prancing, head-nodding horses, with large, orange rosettes by their ears; exquisite footmen, in orange liveries turned up with green and silver, and such powdered hair, and delightfully moulded limbs!—(could it be true, people asked in the crowd, that he had his liveries of the celebrated slop tailors, Aaron Brothers?)—the elegant puce-coloured chariot of the Earl of Dashmore, with the beautiful Dashmore arms—a rook, with an olive-branch in his mouth, staring at the rising sun—and the delicate liveries, sky-blue and white; Lady Margrave's family barouche, with her fat chesnuts, and fatter coachman—(the living at Margrave House was magnificent beyond anything;) more chariots of other members of the highest circle; clarences, with the

red hand of baronetcy on their doors ; broughams of professional men : all these formed into a long line in Gloucester Terrace, and extended, indeed, down other terraces of the Regent's Park. And a crowd assembled outside the door of the house, at which the mutes, in black silk scarfs, and a seriousness of aspect which did them much credit, seeing how very little they could possibly have cared about the matter, stood motionless sentries. The straw was still down in the road, to deaden the sound in the ears of him who was now past all hearing ; and the children of the neighbourhood, especially the dirtier of them, availed themselves of this to indulge in many pranks of a haymaking character, burying each other in it, and making cocks of it, and pelting each other with it, and generally conducting themselves in a manner that was rather hilarious than respectful or sympathetic. There were policemen to maintain order ; but the crowd was great, and the